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IN THREE VOLUMES. VOL. III.

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MALCOLM.

CHAPTER I.

MR. CAIRNS AND THE MARQUIS.

THE religious movement amongst the fisher-folk was still going on. Their meeting was now held often during the week, and at the same hour on the Sunday as other people met at church. Nor was it any wonder that, having participated in the fervour which pervaded their gatherings in the cave, they should have come to feel the so-called divine service in the churches of their respective parishes a dull, cold, lifeless, and therefore unhelpful ordinance, and at length regarding it as composed of beggarly elements, breathing of bondage, to fill the Baillies' Barn three times every Sunday—a reverential and eager congregation.

Now, had they confined their prayers and exhortations to those which, from an ecclesiastical point of view, constitute the unholy days of the week,

Mr. Cairns would have neither condescended nor presumed to take any notice of them; but when the bird's-eye view from his pulpit began to show patches of bare board where human forms had wont to appear; and when these plague-spots had not only lasted through successive Sundays, but had begun to spread more rapidly, he began to think it time to put a stop to such fanatical aberrations—the result of pride and spiritual presumption—hostile towards God, and rebellious towards their lawful rulers and instructors.

For what an absurdity it was that the spirit of truth should have anything to communicate to illiterate and vulgar persons except through the mouths of those to whom had been committed the dispensation of the means of grace! Whatever wind might blow, except from their bellows, was to Mr. Cairns at least, not even of doubtful origin. Indeed the priests of every religion, taken in class, have been the slowest to recognize the wind of the spirit, and the quickest to tell whence the blowing came and whither it went—even should it have blown first on their side of the hedge. And how could it be otherwise? How should they recognize as a revival the motions of life unfelt in their own

hearts, where it was most required? What could they know of doubts and fears, terrors and humiliations, agonies of prayer, ecstasies of relief and thanksgiving, who regarded their high calling as a profession, with social claims and ecclesiastical rights; and even as such had so little respect for it that they talked of it themselves as *the cloth?* How could such a man as Mr. Cairns, looking down from the height of his great soberness, and the dignity of possessing the oracles and the ordinances, do other than contemn the enthusiasms and excitements of ignorant repentance? How could such as he recognize in the babble of babes the slightest indication of the revealing of truths hid from the wise and prudent; especially since their rejoicing also was that of babes, hence carnal, and accompanied by all the weaknesses and some of the vices which it had required the utmost energy of the prince of apostles to purge from one at least of the early churches?

He might, however, have sought some foundation for a true judgment, in a personal knowledge of their doctrine and collective behaviour; but, instead of going to hear what the babblers had to say, and thus satisfying himself whether the leaders of the move-

ment spoke the words of truth and soberness, or of discord and denial—whether their teaching and their prayers were on the side of order and law, or tending to sedition—he turned a ready ear to all the reports afloat concerning them, and, misjudging them utterly, made up his mind to use all *lawful* means for putting an end to their devotions and exhortations. One fact he either had not heard or made no account of —that the public-houses in the villages whence these assemblies were chiefly gathered, had already come to be all but deserted.

Alone, then, and unsupported by one of his brethren of the Presbytery, even of those who suffered like himself, he repaired to Lossie House, and laid before the marquis the whole matter from his point of view:—that the tabernacles of the Lord were deserted for dens and caves of the earth; that fellows so void of learning as not to be able to put a sentence together, or talk decent English, (a censure at which Lord Lossie smiled, for his ears were accustomed to a different quality of English from that which now invaded them) took upon themselves to expound the Scriptures; that they taught antinomianism, (for which assertion, it must be confessed, there was some *apparent* ground) and were

at the same time suspected of Arminianism and Anabaptism! that, in a word, they were a terrible disgrace to the godly and hitherto sober-minded parishes in which the sect, if it might be dignified with even such a name, had sprung up.

The marquis listened with much indifference, and some impatience: what did he or any other gentleman care about such things? Besides, he had a friendly feeling towards the fisher-folk, and a decided disinclination to meddle with their liberty, either of action or utterance.*

"But what have I to do with it, Mr. Cairns?" he said, when the stream of the parson's utterance had at length ceased to flow. "I am not a theologian; and if I were, I do not see how that even would give me a right to interfere."

"In such times of insubordination as these, my lord," said Mr. Cairns, "when every cadger thinks

* Ill, from all artistic points of view, as such a note comes in, I must, for reasons paramount to artistic considerations, remind my readers, that not only is the date of my story half a century or so back, but, dealing with principles, has hardly anything to do with actual events, and nothing at all with persons. The *local* skeleton of the story alone is taken from the real, and I had not a model, not to say an original, for one of the characters in it—except indeed Mrs. Catanach's dog.

himself as good as an earl, it is more than desirable that not a single foothold should be lost. There *must* be a general election soon, my lord. Besides, these men abuse your lordship's late hospitality, declaring it has had the worst possible influence on the morals of the people."

A shadow of truth rendered this assertion the worse misrepresentation: no blame to the marquis had even been hinted at; the speakers had only animadverted on the fishermen who had got drunk on the occasion.

"Still," said the marquis, smiling, for the reported libel did not wound him very deeply, "what ground of right have I to interfere?"

"The shore is your property, my lord—every rock and every buckie (*spiral shell*) upon it; the caves are your own—every stone and pebble of them: you can prohibit all such assemblies."

"And what good would that do? They would only curse me, and go somewhere else."

"Where could they go, where the same law would n't hold, my lord? The coast is yours for miles and miles on both sides."

"I don't know that it should be."

"Why not, my lord? It has belonged to your

family from time immemorial, and will belong to it, I trust, while the moon endureth."

"They used to say," said the marquis thoughtfully, as if he were recalling something he had heard long ago, "that the earth was the Lord's."

"This part of it is Lord Lossie's," said Mr. Cairns, combining the jocular with the complimentary in one irreverence; but, as if to atone for the freedom he had taken—"The Deity has committed it to the great ones of the earth to rule for him," he added, with a devout obeisance to the delegate.

Lord Lossie laughed inwardly.

"You can even turn them out of their houses, if you please, my lord," he superadded.

"God forbid!" said the marquis.

"A threat—the merest hint of such a measure is all that would be necessary."

"But are you certain of the truth of these accusations?"

"My lord!"

"Of course you believe them, or you would not repeat them, but it does not follow that they are fact."

"They are matter of common report, my lord. What I have stated is in every one's mouth."

"But you have not yourself heard any of their sermons, or what do they call them?"

"No, my lord," said Mr. Cairns, holding up his white hands in repudiation of the idea; "it would scarcely accord with my position to act the spy."

"So to keep yourself immaculate, you take all against them for granted! I have no such scruples, however. I will go and see, or rather hear, what they are about: after that I shall be in a position to judge."

"Your lordship's presence will put them on their guard."

"If the mere sight of me is a check," returned the marquis, "extreme measures will hardly be necessary."

He spoke definitively, and made a slight movement, which his visitor accepted as his dismissal. He laughed aloud when the door closed, for the spirit of what the Germans call *Schadenfreude* was never far from his elbow, and he rejoiced in the parson's discomfiture. It was in virtue of his simplicity, precluding discomfiture, that Malcolm could hold his own with him so well. For him he now sent.

"Well, MacPhail," he said kindly, as the youth entered, "how is that foot of yours getting on?"

"Brawly, my lord; there's naething muckle the maitter wi' hit or me aither, noo 'at we're up. But I was jist nearhan' deid o' ower muckle bed."

"Had n't you better come down out of that cock-loft?" said the marquis, dropping his eyes.

"Na, my lord; I dinna care aboot pairtin' wi' my neebour yet."

"What neighbour?"

"Ow, the auld warlock, or whatever it may be 'at hauds a reemish (*romage*) there."

"What! is *he* troublesome next?"

"Ow, na! I'm no thinkin' 't; but 'deed I dinna ken, my lord!" said Malcolm.

"What do you mean, then?"

"Gien yer lordship wad alloo me to force yon door, I wad be better able to tell ye."

"Then the old man is *not* quiet?"

"There 's something no quaiet."

"Nonsense! It's all your imagination—depend on it."

"I dinna think it."

"What *do* you think then? You're not afraid of ghosts, surely?"

"No muckle. I hae naething mair upo' my conscience nor I can bide i' the deidest o' the nicht."

"Then you think ghosts come of a bad conscience? A kind of moral *delirium tremens*—eh?"

"I dinna ken, my lord; but that's the only kin' o' ghaist I wad be fleyed at—at least 'at I wad rin frae. I wad a heap raither hae a ghaist i' my hoose nor ane far'er benn. An ill man, or wuman, like Mistress Catanach, for enstance, 'at 's a' boady, 'cep' what o' her 's deevil,——"

"Nonsense!" said the marquis, angrily; but Malcolm went on:

"——maun be jist fu' o' ghaists! An' for onything I ken, that 'll be what maks ghaists o' themsel's efter they 're deid, settin' them *walkin'*, as they ca' 't. It 's full waur nor bein' possessed wi' deevils, an' maun be a hantle mair ooncoamfortable.—But I *wad* hae yon door opent, my lord."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the marquis once more, and shrugged his shoulders. "You must leave that room. If I hear anything more about noises, or that sort of rubbish, I shall insist upon it.—I sent for you now, however, to ask you about these clandestine meetings of the fisher-folk."

"Clandestine, my lord? There's no *clam* aboot them, but the clams upo' the rocks."

The marquis was not etymologist enough to under-

stand Malcolm's poor pun, and doubtless thought it worse than it was.

"I don't want any fooling," he said. "Of course you know these people?"

"Ilka man, wuman, an' bairn o' them," answered Malcolm.

"And what sort are they?"

"Siclike as ye micht expec'."

"That's not a very luminous answer."

"Weel, they're nae waur nor ither fowk, to begin wi'; an' gien this hauds, they'll be better nor mony."

"What sort are their leaders?"

"Guid, respectable fowk, my lord."

"Then there's not much harm in *them?*"

"There's nane but what they wad fain be rid o'. I canna say as muckle for a' 'at hings on to them. There's o' them, nae doobt, wha wad fain win to h'aven ohn left their sins ahin' them; but they get nae encouragement frae Maister MacLeod. Blue Peter, 'at gangs oot wi' 's i' yer lordship's boat—he's ane o' their best men—though he never gangs ayont prayin', I 'm tauld."

"Which is far enough, surely," said his lordship, who, belonging to the Episcopal church, had a dif-

ferent idea concerning the relative dignities of preaching and praying.

"Ay, for a body's sel', surely; but maybe no aye eneuch for ither fowk," answered Malcolm, always ready after his clumsy fashion.

"Have you been to any of these meetings?"

"I was at the first twa, my lord."

"Why not more?"

"I didna care muckle aboot them, an' I hae aye plenty to du. Besides, I can get mair oot o' Maister Graham wi' twa words o' a queston nor the haill crew o' them could tell me atween this an' eternity."

"Well, I am going to trust you," said the marquis slowly, with an air of question rather than of statement.

"Ye may du that, my lord."

"You mean I may with safety?"

"I div mean that same, my lord."

"You can hold your tongue then?"

"I can, an' I will, my lord," said Malcolm; but added in haste, "—'cep' it interfere wi' ony foregane agreement or nat'ral obligation."

It must be borne in mind that Malcolm was in the habit of discussing all sorts of questions with Mr. Graham: some of the formulæ wrought out be-

tween them he had made himself thoroughly master of.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed the marquis, with a pause of amusement. "Well," he went on, "I suppose I must take you on your own terms.—They 've been asking me to put a stop to these conventicles."

"Wha has, my lord?"

"That 's my business."

"Lat it be nae ither body's, my lord."

"That 's my intention. I told him I would go and judge for myself."

"Jist like yer lordship!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I was aye sure ye was for fair play, my lord."

"It's little enough I've ever had," said the marquis.

"Sae lang 's we gie plenty, my lord, it maitters less hoo muckle we get. A'body likes to get it."

"That doctrine won't carry you far, my lad."

"Far eneuch, gien 't cairry me throu', my lord."

"How absolute the knave is!" said his lordship good-humouredly. "— Well, but," he resumed, "— about these fishermen: I'm only afraid Mr. Cairns was right."

"What said he, my lord?"

"That, when they saw me there, they would fit their words to my ears."

"I ken them better nor ony black-coat atween Cromarty an' Peterheid; an' I can tell yer lordship there winna be ae word o' differ for your bein' there."

"If only I could be there and not there both at once! there's no other sure mode of testing your assertion. What a pity the only thorough way should be an impossible one!"

"To a' practical purpose, it's easy eneuch, my lord. Jist gang ohn be seen the first nicht, an' the neist gang in a co'ch an' fower. Syne compaur."

"Quite satisfactory, no doubt, if I could bring myself to do it; but, though I said I would, I don't like to interfere so far even as to go at all."

"At ony public meetin', my lord, ye hae as guid a richt to be present, as the puirest body i' the lan'. An' forbye that, as lord o' the place, ye hae a richt to ken what's gaein' on: I dinna ken hoo far the richt o' interferin' gangs; that's anither thing a'thegither."

"I see you're a thorough-going rebel yourself."

"Naething o' the kin', my lord. I'm only sae far o' yer lordship min' 'at I like fair play—gien a body could only be aye richt sure what was fair play!"

"Yes, there's the very point!—certainly, at least, when the question comes to be of eaves-dropping—not to mention that I could never condescend to play the spy."

"What a body has a richt to hear, he may hear as he likes—either shawin' himsel' or hidin' himsel'. An' it's the *only* plan 'at 's fair to them, my lord. It's no 's gien yer lordship was lyin' in wait to du them a mischeef: ye want raither to du them a kin'ness, an' tak their pairt."

"I don't know that, Malcolm. It depends."

"It 's plain yer lordship's prejudeezed i' their fawvour. 'Ony gait I 'm sartin it 's fair play ye want; an' I canna for the life o' me see a hair o' wrang i' yer lordship's gaein' *in a cogue*, as auld Tammy Dyster ca's 't; for, at the warst, ye cud only interdick them, an' that ye cud du a' the same, whether ye gaed or no. An', gien ye be sae wulled, I can tak you an' my leddy whaur ye 'll hear ilka word 'at 's uttered, an' no a body get a glimp o' ye, mair nor gien ye was sittin' at yer ain fireside as ye are the noo."

"That does make a difference!" said the marquis, a great part of whose unwillingness arose from the dread of discovery.—"It would be very amusing."

"I'll no promise ye that," returned Malcolm. "I dinna ken aboot that.—There's jist ae objection hooever: ye wad hae to gang a guid hoor afore they begoud to gaither.—An' there's aye laadies aboot the place sin' they turned it intill a kirk!" he added thoughtfully. "—But," he resumed, "we cud manage them."

"How?"

"I wad get my gran'father to strik' up wi' a spring upo' the pipes, o' the ither side o' the bored craig—or lat aff a shot o' the sweevil: they wad a' rin to see, an' i' the meantime we cud lan' ye frae the cutter. We wad hae ye in an' oot o' sicht in a moment—Blue Peter an' me—as quaiet as gien ye war ghaists, an' the hoor midnicht."

The marquis was persuaded, but objected to the cutter. They would walk there, he said. So it was arranged that Malcolm should take him and Lady Florimel to the Baillies' Barn the very next time the fishermen had a meeting.

CHAPTER II.

THE BAILLIES' BARN.

LADY FLORIMEL was delighted at the prospect of such an adventure. The evening arrived. An hour before the time appointed for the meeting, the three issued from the tunnel, and passed along the landward side of the dune, towards the promontory. There sat the piper on the swivel, ready to sound a pibroch the moment they should have reached the shelter of the bored craig—his signal being Malcolm's whistle. The plan answered perfectly. In a few minutes, all the children within hearing were gathered about Duncan—a rarer sight to them than heretofore—and the way was clear to enter unseen.

It was already dusk, and the cave was quite dark, but Malcolm lighted a candle, and, with a little difficulty, got them up into the wider part of the cleft, where he had arranged comfortable seats with plaids and cushions. As soon as they were placed, he extinguished the light.

"I wish you would tell us another story, Malcolm," said Lady Florimel.

"Do," said the marquis: "the place is not consecrated yet."

"Did ye ever hear the tale o' the auld warlock, my lady?" asked Malcolm. "—Only my lord kens 't!" he added.

"*I* don't," said Lady Florimel.

"It's great nonsense," said the marquis.

"Do let us have it, papa."

"Very well. I don't mind hearing it again."

He wanted to see how Malcolm would embellish it.

"It seems to me," said Malcolm, "that this ane aboot Lossie Hoose, an' yon ane aboot Colonsay Castel, are verra likly but twa stalks frae the same rute. Ony gait, this ane aboot the warlock maun be the auldest o' the twa. Ye s' hae 't sic 's I hae 't mysel'. Mistress Coorthoup taul' 't to me."

It was after his own more picturesque fashion, however, that he recounted the tale of Lord Gernon.

As the last words left his lips, Lady Florimel gave a startled cry, seized him by the arm, and crept close to him. The marquis jumped to his feet, knocked his head against the rock, uttered an oath, and sat down again.

"What ails ye, my leddy?" said Malcolm. "There's naething here to hurt ye."

"I saw a face," she said, "— a white face!"

"Whaur?"

"Beyond you a little way—near the ground," she answered, in a tremulous whisper.

"It 's as dark 's pick!" said Malcolm, as if thinking it to himself.—He knew well enough that it must be the laird or Phemy, but he was anxious the marquis should not learn the secret of the laird's refuge.

"I saw a face anyhow," said Florimel. "It gleamed white for one moment, and then vanished."

"I wonner ye didna cry oot waur, my leddy," said Malcolm, peering into the darkness.

"I was too frightened. It looked so ghastly!—not more than a foot from the ground."

"Cud it hae been a flash, like, frae yer ain een?"

"No; I am sure it was a face."

"How much is there of this cursed hole?" asked the marquis, rubbing the top of his head.

"A heap," answered Malcolm. "The grun' gangs doon like a brae ahin' 's, intill a——"

"You don't mean right behind us?" cried the marquis.

"Nae jist closs, my lord. We're sittin' i' the mou' o' 't, like, wi' the thrapple (*throat*) o' 't ahin' 's, an' a muckle stamach ayont that."

"I hope there's no danger," said the marquis.

"Nane 'at I ken o'."

"No water at the bottom?"

"Nane, my lord—that is, naething but a bonny spring i' the rock-side."

"Come away, papa!" cried Florimel. "I don't like it. I've had enough of this kind of thing."

"Nonsense!" said the marquis, still rubbing his head.

"Ye wad spile a', my leddy! It's ower late, forbye," said Malcolm; "I hear a fut."

He rose and peeped out, but drew back instantly, saying in a whisper:

"It's Mistress Catanach wi' a lantren! Haud yer tongue, my bonny leddy; ye ken weel she's no mowse. Dinna try to leuk, my lord; she micht get a glimp o' ye—she's terrible gleg. I hae been hearin' mair yet aboot her. Yer lordship 's ill to convence, but depen' upo' 't, whaurever that wuman is, there there's mischeef! Whaur she taks a scunner at a body, she hates like the verra deevil. She winna aye lat them ken 't, but taks time to du her ill turns. An' it 's no that only, but gien she gets a haud o' onything agane onybody, she 'll save 't up upo' the chance o' their giein' her some offence

afore they dee. She never lowses haud o' the tail o' a thing, an' at her ain proaper time, she 's in her natur' bun' to mak the warst use o' 't."

Malcolm was anxious both to keep them still, and to turn aside any further inquiry as to the face Florimel had seen. Again he peeped out.

"What *is* she efter noo? She 's comin' this gait," he went on, in a succession of whispers, turning his head back over his shoulder when he spoke. "Gien she thoucht there was a hole i' the perris she didna ken a' the oots an' ins o', it wad haud her ohn sleepit.—Weesht! weesht! here she comes!" he concluded, after a listening pause, in the silence of which he could hear her step approaching.

He stretched out his neck over the ledge, and saw her coming straight for the back of the cave, looking right before her with slow-moving, keen, wicked eyes. It was impossible to say what made them look wicked: neither in form, colour, motion, nor light, were they ugly—yet in every one of these they looked wicked, as her lantern, which, being of horn, she had opened for more light, now and then, as it swung in her hand, shone up on her pale, pulpy, evil countenance.

"Gien she tries to come up, I'll hae to caw her

doon," he said to himself, "an' I dinna like it, for she's a wuman efter a', though a deevilich kin' o' a ane; but there's my leddy! I hae broucht her intill 't, an' I maun see her safe oot o' 't!"

But if Mrs. Catanach was bent on an exploration, she was for the time prevented from prosecuting it by the approach of the first of the worshippers, whose voices they now plainly heard. She retreated towards the middle of the cave, and sat down in a dark corner, closing her lantern and hiding it with the skirt of her long cloak. Presently a good many entered at once, some carrying lanterns, and most of them tallow candles, which they quickly lighted and disposed about the walls. The rest of the congregation, with its leaders, came trooping in so fast, that in ten minutes or so the service began.

As soon as the singing commenced, Malcolm whispered to Lady Florimel,—

"Was 't a man's face or a lassie's ye saw, my leddy?"

"A man's face—the same we saw in the storm,' she answered, and Malcolm felt her shudder as she spoke.

"It 's naething but the mad laird," he said. "He 's better nor hairmless. Dinna say a word to yer

father, my leddy. I dinna like to say that, but I 'll tell ye a' what for efterhin'."

But Florimel, knowing that her father had a horror of lunatics, was willing enough to be silent.

No sooner was her terror thus assuaged, than the oddities of the singing laid hold upon her, stirring up a most tyrannous impulse to laughter. The prayer that followed made it worse. In itself the prayer was perfectly reverent, and yet, for dread of irreverence, I must not attempt a representation of the forms of its embodiment, or the manner of its utterance.

So uncontrollable did her inclination to merriment become, that she found at last the only way to keep from bursting into loud laughter was to slacken the curb, and go off at a canter—I mean, to laugh freely but gently. This so infected her father, that he straightway accompanied her, but with more noise. Malcolm sat in misery, from the fear not so much of discovery, though that would be awkward enough, as of the loss to the laird of his best refuge. But when he reflected, he doubted much whether it was even now a safe one; and, anyhow, knew it would be as vain to remonstrate as to try to stop the noise of a brook by casting pebbles into it.

When it came to the sermon, however, things went better; for MacLeod was the preacher,—an eloquent man after his kind, in virtue of the genuine earnestness of which he was full. If his anxiety for others appeared to be rather to save them from the consequences of their sins, his main desire for himself certainly was to be delivered from evil; the growth of his spiritual nature, while it rendered him more and more dissatisfied with himself, had long left behind all fear save of doing wrong. His sermon this evening was founded on the text: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." He spoke fervently and persuasively; nor, although his tone and accent were odd, and his Celtic modes and phrases to those Saxon ears outlandish, did these peculiarities in the least injure the influence of the man. Even from Florimel was the demon of laughter driven; and the marquis, although not a single notion of what the man intended passed through the doors of his understanding, sat quiet, and disapproved of nothing. Possibly, had he been alone as he listened, he too, like one of old, might have heard, in the dark cave, the still small voice of a presence urging him forth to the light; but, as it was, the whole utterance passed without a single

word or phrase or sentence having roused a thought, or suggested a doubt, or moved a question, or hinted an objection or a need of explanation. That the people present should interest themselves in such things, only set before him the folly of mankind. The text and the preacher both kept telling him that such as he could by no possibility have the slightest notion what *such things* were; but not the less did he, as if he knew all about them, wonder how the deluded fisher-folk could sit and listen. The more tired he grew, the more angry he got with the parson who had sent him there with his foolery; and the more convinced that the men who prayed and preached were as honest as they were silly; and that the thing to die of itself had only to be let alone. He heard the Amen of the benediction with a sigh of relief, and rose at once—cautiously this time.

"Ye maunna gang yet, my lord," said Malcolm. "They maun be a' oot first."

"I don't care who sees me," protested the weary man.

"But yer lordship wadna like to be descriet scram'lin' doon efter the back like the bear in Robinson Crusoe!"

The marquis grumbled, and yielded impatiently.

At length Malcolm, concluding from the silence that the meeting had thoroughly *skailed*, peeped cautiously out to make sure. But, after a moment, he drew back, saying in a regretful whisper,—

"I'm sorry ye canna gang yet, my lord. There's some half a dizzen o' ill-luikin' chields, cairds (*gipsies*), I'm thinkin', or maybe waur, congregat doon there, an' it's my opingon they're efter nae guid, my lord."

"How do you know that?"

"Ony body wad ken that, 'at got a glimp o' them."

"Let me look."

"Na, my lord; ye dinna understan' the lie o' the stanes eneuch to haud oot o' sicht."

"How long do you mean to keep us here?" asked the marquis impatiently.

"Till it's safe to gang, my lord. For onything I ken, they may be efter comin' up here. They may be used to the place—though I dinna think it."

"In that case we must go down at once. We must *not* let them find us here."

"They wad tak 's ane by ane as we gaed doon, my lord, an' we wadna hae a chance. Think o' my leddy there!"

Florimel heard all, but with the courage of her race.

"This is a fine position you have brought us into, MacPhail!" said his master, now thoroughly uneasy for his daughter's sake.

"Nae waur nor I'll tak ye oot o', gien ye lippen to me, my lord, an' no speyk a word."

"If you tell them who papa is," said Florimel, "they won't do us any harm, surely!"

"I'm nane sae sure o' that. They micht want to rype 's pooches (*search his pockets*), an' my lord wad ill stan' that, I'm thinkin'! Na, na. Jist stan' ye back, my lord an' my leddy, an' dinna speyk a word. I s' sattle them. They're sic villains, there's nae terms to be hauden wi' them."

His lordship was far from satisfied; but a light shining up into the crevice at the moment, gave powerful support to Malcolm's authority: he took Florimel's hand, and drew her a little farther from the mouth of the cave.

"Don't you wish we had Demon with us?" whispered the girl.

"I was thinking how I never went without a dagger in Venice," said the marquis, "and never once had occasion to use it. Now I haven't even

penknife about me! It looks very awkward."

"Please don't talk like that," said Florimel. "Can't you trust Malcolm, papa?"

"Oh, yes; perfectly!" he answered; but the tone was hardly up to the words.

They could see the dim figure of Malcolm, outlined in fits of the approaching light, all but filling the narrow entrance, as he bent forward to listen. Presently he laid himself down, leaning on his left elbow, with his right shoulder only a little above the level of the passage. The light came nearer, and they heard the sound of scrambling on the rock, but no voice; then for one moment the light shone clear upon the roof of the cleft; the next, came the sound of a dull blow, the light vanished, and the noise of a heavy fall came from beneath.

"Ane o' them, my lord," said Malcolm, in a sharp whisper, over his shoulder.

A confusion of voices arose.

"You booby!" said one. "You climb like a calf. I'll go next."

Evidently they thought he had slipped and fallen, and he was unable to set them right. Malcolm heard them drag him out of the way.

The second ascended more rapidly, and met his

fate the sooner. As he delivered the blow, Malcolm recognized one of the laird's assailants, and was now perfectly at his ease.

"Twa o' them, my lord," he said. "Gien we had ane mair doon, we cud manage the lave."

The second, however, had not lost his speech, and amidst the confused talk that followed, Malcolm heard the words: "Rin doon to the coble for the gun," and, immediately after, the sound of feet hurrying from the cave. He rose quietly, leaped into the midst of them, came down upon one, and struck out right and left. Two ran, and three lay where they were.

"Gien ane o' ye muv han' or fit, I'll brain him wi' 's ain stick," he cried, as he wrenched a cudgel from the grasp of one of them. Then catching up a lantern, and hurrying behind the projecting rock—"Haste ye, an' come," he shouted. "The w'y 's clear, but only for a meenute."

Florimel appeared, and Malcolm got her down.

"Mind that fellow," cried the marquis from above.

Malcolm turned quickly, and saw the gleam of a knife in the grasp of his old enemy, who had risen, and crept behind him to the recess. He flung the lantern in his face, following it with a blow in which

were concentrated all the weight and energy of his frame. The man went down again heavily, and Malcolm instantly trampled all their lanterns to pieces.

"Noo," he said to himself, "they winna ken but it 's the laird an' Phemy wi' me!"

Then turning, and taking Florimel by the arm, he hurried her out of the cave, followed by the marquis.

They emerged in the liquid darkness of a starry night. Lady Florimel clung to both her father and Malcolm. It was a rough way for some little distance, but at length they reached the hard wet sand, and the marquis would have stopped to take breath; but Malcolm was uneasy, and hurried them on.

"What are you frightened at now?" asked his lordship.

"Naething," answered Malcolm, adding to himself however,—"I 'm fleyt *at* naething—I 'm fleyt *for* the laird."

As they approached the tunnel, he fell behind.

"Why don't you come on?" said his lordship.

"I 'm gaein' back noo 'at ye 're safe," said Malcolm.

"Going back! What for?" asked the marquis.

"I maun see what thae villains are up till," answered Malcolm.

"Not alone, surely!" exclaimed the marquis. "At least get some of your people to go with you."

"There's nae time, my lord. Dinna be fleyt for me: I s' tak care o' mysel'."

He was already yards away, running at full speed. The marquis shouted after him, but Malcolm would not hear.

When he reached the Baillies' Barn once more, all was still. He groped his way in and found his own lantern where they had been sitting, and having lighted it, descended and followed the windings of the cavern a long way, but saw nothing of the laird or Phemy. Coming at length to a spot where he heard the rushing of a stream, he found he could go no further: the roof of the cave had fallen, and blocked up the way with huge masses of stone and earth. He had come a good distance, certainly, but by no means so far as Phemy's imagination had represented the reach of the cavern. He might however have missed a turn, he thought.

The sound he heard was that of the Lossie Burn, flowing along in the starlight through the grounds of the House. Of this he satisfied himself after-

wards; and then it seemed to him not unlikely that in ancient times the river had found its way to the sea along the cave, for throughout its length the action of water was plainly visible. But perhaps the sea itself had used to go roaring along the great duct: Malcolm was no geologist, and could not tell.

CHAPTER III.

MRS. STEWART'S CLAIM.

THE weather became unsettled with the approach of winter, and the marquis had a boat-house built at the west end of the Seaton: there the little cutter was laid up, well wrapt in tarpaulins, like a butterfly returned to the golden coffin of her internatal chrysalis. A great part of his resulting leisure, Malcolm spent with Mr. Graham, to whom he had, as a matter of course, unfolded the trouble caused him by Duncan's communication.

The more thoughtful a man is, and the more conscious of what is going on within himself, the more interest will he take in what he can know of his progenitors, to the remotest generations; and a regard to ancestral honours, however contemptible the forms which the appropriation of them often assumes, is a plant rooted in the deepest soil of humanity. The high-souled labourer will yield to none in his respect for the dignity of his origin, and Malcolm had been as proud of the humble descent he supposed his own, as Lord Lossie was

of his mighty ancestry. Malcolm had indeed a loftier sense of resulting dignity than his master.

He reverenced Duncan both for his uprightness and for a certain grandeur of spirit, which, however ridiculous to the common eye, would have been glorious in the eyes of the chivalry of old; he looked up to him with admiration because of his gifts in poetry and music; and loved him endlessly for his unfailing goodness and tenderness to himself. Even the hatred of the grand old man had an element of unselfishness in its retroaction, of power in its persistency, and of greatness in its absolute contempt of compromise. At the same time he was the only human being to whom Malcolm's heart had gone forth as to his own; and now, with the knowledge of yet deeper cause for loving him, he had to part with the sense of a filial relation to him! And this involved more; for so thoroughly had the old man come to regard the boy as his offspring, that he had nourished in him his own pride of family; and it added a sting of mortification to Malcolm's sorrow, that the greatness of the legendary descent in which he had believed, and the honourableness of the mournful history with which his thoughts of himself had been so closely

associated, were swept from him utterly. Nor was this all even yet: in losing these, he had had, as it were, to let go his hold, not of his clan merely, but of his race: every link of kin that bound him to humanity had melted away from his grasp. Suddenly he would become aware that his heart was sinking within him, and questioning it why, would learn anew that he was alone in the world, a being without parents, without sister or brother, with none to whom he might look in the lovely confidence of a right bequeathed by some common mother, near or afar. He had waked into being, but all around him was dark, for there was no window, that is, no kindred eye, by which the light of the world whence he had come, entering might console him.

But a gulf of blackness was about to open at his feet, against which the darkness he now lamented would show purple and gray.

One afternoon, as he passed through the Seaton from the harbour, to have a look at the cutter, he heard the Partaness calling after him.

"Weel, ye're a sicht for sair een—noo 'at ye're like to turn oot something worth luikin' at!" she cried, as he approached with his usual friendly smile

"What du ye mean by that, Mistress Findlay?" asked Malcolm, carelessly adding: "Is yer man in?"

"Ay!" she went on, without heeding either question; "ye'll be gran' set up noo! Ye'll no be haein' 'a fine day' to fling at yer auld freen's, the puir fisher-fowk, or lang! Weel! it's the w'y o' the warl! Hech, sirs!"

"What on earth 's set ye aff like that, Mistress Findlay?" said Malcolm. "It's nae sic a feerious (*furious*) gran' thing to be my lord's skipper—or henchman, as my daddy wad hae 't—surely! It's a heap gran'er like to be a free fisherman, wi' a boat o' yer ain, like the Partan!"

"Hoots! Nane o' yer clavers! Ye ken weel eneuch what I mean—as weel 's ilka ither creatit sowl i' Portlossie. An' gien ye dinna chowse to lat on aboot it till an 'auld freen' 'cause she's naething but a fisherwife, it's dune ye mair skaith a'ready nor I thoucht it wad to the lang last, Ma'colm—for it 's yer ain name I s' ca' ye yet, gien ye war ten times a laird!—didna I gie ye the breist whan ye cud du naething i' the wardle but sowk?—An' weel ye sowkit, puir innocent—'at ye *was!*"

"As sure's we're baith alive," asseverated Mal-

colm, "I ken nae mair nor a sawtit herrin' what ye're drivin' at."

"Tell me 'at ye dinna ken what a' the queentry kens—an' hit aboot yer ain sel'!" screamed the Partaness.

"I tell ye I ken naething; an' gien ye dinna tell me what ye're efter direckly, I s' haud awa' to Mistress Ailison: *she* 'll tell me."

This was a threat sufficiently prevailing.

"It's no in natur'!" she cried. "Here's Mistress Stewart o' the Gersefell been cawin' (*driving*) like mad aboot the place, in her cairriage an' hoo mony horse I dinna ken, declarin', ay, sweirin,' they tell me, 'at ane cowmonly ca'd Ma'colm MacPhail is neither mair nor less nor the son born o' her ain boady in honest wadlock!—an' tell me *ye* ken naething aboot it! —What are ye stan'in' like that for—as graymou'd 's a deein' skate?"

For the first time in his life, Malcolm, young and strong as he was, felt sick. Sea and sky grew dim before him, and the earth seemed to reel under him.

"I dinna believe 't," he faltered—and turned away.

"Ye dinna believe what I tell ye!" screeched the wrathful Partaness. "Ye daur to say the word!"

But Malcolm did not care to reply. He wandered away, half unconscious of where he was, his head hanging, and his eyes creeping over the ground. The words of the woman kept ringing in his ears; but ever and anon, behind them as it were, in the depths of his soul, he heard the voice of the mad laird, with its one lamentation: "I dinna ken whaur I cam' frae." Finding himself at length at Mr. Graham's door, he wondered how he had got there.

It was Saturday afternoon, and the master was in the churchyard. Startled by Malcolm's look, he gazed at him in grave silent inquiry.

"Hae ye h'ard the ill news, sir?" said the youth.

"No; I'm sorry to hear there is any."

"They tell me Mistress Stewart's rinnin' aboot the toon claimin' me!"

"Claiming you!—How do you mean?"

"For her ain!"

"Not for her son?"

"Ay, sir—that 's what they say. But ye haena h'ard o' 't?"

"Not a word."

"Then I believe it's a' havers!" cried Malcolm energetically. "It was sair eneuch upo' me a'ready to ken less o' whaur I cam frae than the puir laird himsel'; but to come frae whaur he cam frae, was a thoucht ower sair!"

"You don't surely despise the poor fellow so much as to scorn to have the same parents with him!" said Mr. Graham.

"The verra contrar', sir. But a wuman wha wad sae misguide the son o' her ain body, an' for naething but that, as she had broucht him furth, sic he was! —it 's no to be lichtly believed nor lichtly endured. I s' awa' to Miss Horn an' see whether *she* 's h'ard ony sic leein' clashes."

But as Malcolm uttered her name, his heart sank within him, for their talk the night he had sought her hospitality for the laird, came back to his memory, burning like an acrid poison.

"You can't do better," said Mr. Graham. "The report itself may be false—or true, and the lady mistaken."

"She'll hae to pruv 't weel afore I say *haud*," rejoined Malcolm.

"And suppose she does?"

"In that case," said Malcolm, with a composure

almost ghastly, "a man maun tak what mither it pleases God to gie him. But faith! she winna du wi' me as wi' the puir laird. Gien she taks me up, she'll repent 'at she didna lat me lie. She'll be as little pleased wi' the tane o' her sons as the tither—I can tell her, ohn propheseed!"

"But think what you might do between mother and son," suggested the master, willing to reconcile him to the possible worst.

"It's ower late for that," he answered. "The puir man's thairms (*fiddle-strings*) are a' hingin' lowse, an' there's no grip eneuch i' the pegs to set them up again. He wad but think I had gane ower to the enemy, an' haud oot o' *my* gait as eident (*diligently*) as he hauds oot o' hers. Na, it wad du naething for him. Gien 't warna for what I see in *him*, I wad hae a gran' rebutter to her claim; for hoo cud ony wuman's ain son hae sic a scunner at her as I hae i' my hert an' brain an' verra stamach? Gien she war my ain mither, there bude to be some nait'ral drawin's atween 's, a body wad think. But it winna haud, for there's the laird! The verra name o' mither gars him steik his lugs an' rin."

"Still, if she should be your mother, it's for

better for worse, as much as if she had been your own choice."

"I kenna weel hoo it cud be for waur," said Malcolm, who did not yet, even from his recollection of the things Miss Horn had said, comprehend what worst threatened him.

"It does seem strange," said the master thoughtfully, after a pause, "that some women should be allowed to be mothers!—that through them sons and daughters of God should come into the world —thief-babies, say!—human parasites, with no choice but feed on the social body!"

"I wonner what God thinks aboot it a'! It gars a body speir whether he cares or no," said Malcolm gloomily.

"It does," responded Mr. Graham solemnly.

"Div *ye* alloo that sir?" returned Malcolm aghast. "That soon's as gien a'thing war rushin' thegither back to the auld châos."

"I should not be surprised," continued the master, apparently heedless of Malcolm's consternation, "if the day should come when well-meaning men, excellent in the commonplace, but of dwarfed imagination, refused to believe in a God on the ground of apparent injustice in the very frame and

constitution of things. Such would argue, that there might be either an omnipotent being who did not care, or a good being who could not help; but that there could not be a being both all-good and omnipotent, for such would never have suffered things to be as they are."

"What wad the clergy say to hear ye, sir?" said Malcolm, himself almost trembling at the words of his master.

"Nothing to the purpose, I fear. They would never face the question. I know what they would do if they could,—burn me, as their spiritual ancestor, Calvin, would have done—whose shoe-latchet they are yet not worthy to unloose. But mind, my boy, you've not heard me speak *my* thought on the matter at all."

"But wadna 't be better to believe in twa Gods nor nane ava'?" propounded Malcolm;—"ane a' guid, duin' the best for 's he cud, the ither a' ill, but as pooerfu' as the guid ane—an' for ever an' aye a fecht atween them, whiles ane gettin' the warst o' 't, an' whiles the ither? It wad quaiet yer hert ony gait, an' the battle o' Armageddon wad gang on as gran' 's ever."

"Two Gods there could not be," said Mr. Graham.

"Of the two beings supposed, the evil one must be called *devil*, were he ten times the more powerful."

"Wi' a' my hert," responded Malcolm.

"But I agree with you," the master went on, that "Manicheism is unspeakably better than atheism, and *unthinkably* better than believing in an unjust God. But I am not driven to such a theory."

"Hae ye ane o' yer ain 'at 'll fit, sir?"

"If I knew of a theory in which was never an uncompleted arch or turret, in whose circling wall was never a ragged breach, that theory I should know but to avoid: such gaps are the eternal windows through which the dawn shall look in. A complete theory is a vault of stone around the theorist—whose very being yet depends on room to grow."

"Weel, I wad like to hear what ye hae agane Manicheism?"

"The main objection of theologians would be, I presume, that it did not present a God perfect in power as in goodness; but I think it a far more objectionable point that it presents evil as possessing power in itself. My chief objection, however, would be a far deeper one—namely, that its good being cannot be absolutely good; for, if he knew himself unable to insure the well-being of his crea-

tures, if he could not avoid exposing them to such foreign attack, had he a right to create them? Would he have chosen such a doubtful existence for one whom he meant to love absolutely?—Either, then, he did not love like a God, or he would not have created."

"He micht ken himsel' sure to win i' the lang rin."

"Grant the same to the God of the Bible, and we come back to where we were before."

"Does that saitisfee yersel', Maister Graham?" asked Malcolm, looking deep into the eyes of his teacher.

"Not at all," answered the master.

"Does onything?"

"Yes; but I will not say more on the subject now. The time may come when I shall have to speak that which I have learned, but it is not yet. All I will say now is, that I am at peace concerning the question. Indeed, so utterly do I feel myself the offspring of the One, that it would be enough for my peace now—I don't say it would have been always—to know my mind troubled on a matter: what troubled me would trouble God: my trouble at the seeming wrong must have its being in the right existent in him. In him, supposing I could

find none, I should yet say there *must* lie a lucent, harmonious, eternal, not merely consoling, but absolutely satisfying solution."

"Winna ye tell me a' 'at 's in yer hert aboot it, sir?"

"Not now, my boy. You have got one thing to mind now—before all other things—namely, that you give this woman—whatever she be—fair play: if she be your mother, *as* such you must take her, that is, as such you must treat her."

"Ye 're richt, sir," returned Malcolm, and rose.

"Come back to me," said Mr. Graham, "with whatever news you gather."

"I will, sir," answered Malcolm, and went to find Miss Horn.

He was shown into the little parlour, which, for all the grander things he had been amongst of late, had lost nothing of its first charm. There sat Miss Horn.

"Sit doon, Ma'colm," she said gruffly.

"Hae ye h'ard onything, mem?" asked Malcolm, standing.

"Ay, ower muckle," answered Miss Horn, with all but a scowl. "Ye been ower to Gersefell, I reckon."

"Forbid it!" answered Malcolm. "Never till this hoor—or at maist it's nae twa sin' I h'ard the first cheep o' 't, an' that was frae Meg Partan. To no human sowl hae I made mention o' 't yet 'cep' Maister Graham: to him I gaed direck."

"Ye cudna hae dune better," said the grim woman, with relaxing visage.

"An' here I am the noo, straucht frae him, to beg o' you, Miss Horn, to tell me the trowth o' the maitter."

"What ken I aboot it?" she returned angrily. "What *sud* I ken?"

"Ye micht ken whether the wuman's been sayin' 't or no."

"Wha has ony doobt aboot that?"

"Mistress Stewart *has* been sayin' she's my mither, than?"

"Ay—what for no?" returned Miss Horn with a piercing *glower* at the youth.

"Guid forfen'!" exclaimed Malcolm.

"Say ye that, laddie?" cried Miss Horn, and, starting up, she grasped his arm and stood gazing in his face.

"What ither sud I say?" rejoined Malcolm, surprised.

"God be laudit!" exclaimed Miss Horn. "The limmer may say 'at she likes noo."

"*Ye* dinna believe 't than, mem?" cried Malcolm. "Tell me ye dinna, an' haud me ohn curst like a cadger."

"I dinna believe ae word o' 't, laddie," answered Miss Horn eagerly. "Wha *cud* believe sic a fine laad come o' sic a fause mither?"

"She micht be ony body's mither, an' fause tu," said Malcolm gloomily.

"That's true, laddie; an' the mair mither the fauser! There's a warl' o' witness i' your face 'at gien she be yer mither, the markis, an no puir honest hen-peckit John Stewart, was the father o' ye.—The Lord forgi'e me! what am I sayin'!" adjected Miss Horn, with a cry of self-accusation, when she saw the pallor that overspread the countenance of the youth, and his head drop upon his bosom: the last arrow had sunk to the feather. "It's a' havers, ony gait," she quickly resumed. "I div not believe ye hae ae drap o' her bluid i' the body o' ye, man. But," she hurried on, as if eager to obliterate the scoring impression of her late words —"that she's been sayin' 't, there can be no mainner o' doobt. I saw her mysel' rinnin' aboot the toon,

frae ane till anither, wi' her lang hair doon the lang back o' her, an' fleein' i' the win', like a body dementit. The only queston is, whether or no she believes 't hersel'."

"What cud gar her say 't gien she didna believe 't?"

"Fowk says she expecs that w'y to get a grip o' things oot o' the han's o' the puir laird's trustees: ye wad be a son o' her ain, cawpable o' mainagin' them. But ye dinna tell me she's never been at yersel' aboot it?"

"Never a blink o' the ee has passed atween's sin' that day I gaed till Gersefell, as I tellt ye, wi a letter frae the markis. I thoucht I was ower mony for her than: I wonner she daur be at me again!"

"She 's daurt her God er' noo, an' may weel daur you.—But what says yer gran'father till 't, no?"

"He hasna hard a chuckie's cheep o' 't."

"What are we haverin' at than? Canna he sattle the maitter aff han'?"

Miss Horn eyed him keenly as she spoke.

"He kens no more aboot whaur I come frae, mem, nor your Jean, wha 's hearkenin' at the key-hole this verra meenute."

The quick ear of Malcolm had caught a slight

sound of the handle, whose proximity to the key-hole was no doubt often troublesome to Jean.

Miss Horn seemed to reach the door with one *spang*. Jean was ascending the last step of the stair with a message on her lips concerning butter and eggs. Miss Horn received it, and went back to Malcolm.

"Na; Jean wadna du that," she said quietly.

But she was wrong, for, hearing Malcolm's words, Jean had retreated one step down the stair, and turned.

"But what's this ye tell me aboot yer gran'father, honest man?" Miss Horn continued.

"Duncan MacPhail 's no bluid o' mine—the mair's the pity!" said Malcolm sadly—and told her all he knew.

Miss Horn's visage went through wonderful changes as he spoke.

"Weel, it *is* a mercy I hae no feelin's!" she said when he had done.

"Ony wuman can lay a claim till me 'at likes, ye see," said Malcolm.

"She may lay 'at she likes, but it's no ilka egg laid has a chuckie intill 't," answered Miss Horn sententiously. "Jist ye gang hame to auld Duncan,

an' tell him to turn the thing ower in 's min' till he's able to sweir to the verra nicht he fan' the bairn in 's lap. But no ae word maun he say to leevin' sowl aboot it afore it's requiret o' 'im."

"I wad be the son o' the puirest fisher-wife i' the Seaton raither nor hers," said Malcolm gloomily.

"An' it shaws ye better bred," said Miss Horn. "But she'll be at ye or lang—an' tak ye tent what ye say. Dinna flee in her face; lat her jaw awa', an' mark her words. She may lat a streak o' licht oot o' her dirk lantren oonawaurs."

Malcolm returned to Mr. Graham. They agreed there was nothing for it but to wait. He went next to his grandfather and gave him Miss Horn's message. The old man fell a thinking, but could not be certain even of the year in which he had left his home. The clouds hung very black around Malcolm's horizon.

Since the adventure in the Baillies' Barn, Lady Florimel had been on a visit in Morayshire: she heard nothing of the report until she returned.

"So you're a gentleman after all, Malcolm!" she said, the next time she saw him.

The expression in her eyes appeared to him different from any he had encountered there before.

The blood rushed to his face; he dropped his head, and saying merely, "It maun be a' as it maun," pursued the occupation of the moment.

But her words sent a new wind blowing into the fog. *A gentleman* she had said! Gentlemen married ladies! Could it be that a glory it was madness to dream of, was yet a possibility? One moment, and his honest heart recoiled from the thought: not even for Lady Florimel could he *consent* to be the son of that woman! Yet the thought, especially in Lady Florimel's presence, would return, would linger, would whisper, would tempt.

In Florimel's mind also, a small demon of romance was at work. Uncorrupted as yet by social influences, it would not have seemed to her absurd that an heiress of rank should marry a poor country gentleman; but the thought of marriage never entered her head: she only felt that the discovery justified a nearer approach from both sides. She had nothing, not even a flirtation in view. Flirt she might, likely enough, but she did not foremean it.

Had Malcolm been a schemer, he would have tried to make something of his position. But even the growth of his love for his young mistress was

held in check by the fear of what that love tempted him to desire.

Lady Florimel had by this time got so used to his tone and dialect, hearing it on all sides of her, that its quaintness had ceased to affect her, and its coarseness had begun to influence her repulsively. There were still to be found in Scotland old-fashioned gentlefolk speaking the language of the country with purity and refinement; but Florimel had never met any of them, or she might possibly have been a little less repelled by Malcolm's speech.

Within a day or two of her return, Mrs. Stewart called at Lossie House, and had a long talk with her, in the course of which she found no difficulty in gaining her to promise her influence with Malcolm. From his behaviour on the occasion of their sole interview, she stood in a vague awe of him, and indeed could not recall it without a feeling of rebuke—a feeling which must either turn her aside from her purpose or render her the more anxious to secure his favour. Hence it came that she had not yet sought him: she would have the certainty first that he was kindly disposed towards her claim —a thing she would never have doubted but for the glimpse she had had of him.

One Saturday afternoon, about this time, Mr. Stewart put his head in at the door of the school-room, as he had done so often already, and seeing the master seated alone at his desk, walked in, saying once more, with a polite bow,—

"I dinna ken whaur I cam frae: I want to come to the school."

Mr. Graham assured him of welcome as cordially as if it had been the first time he came with the request, and yet again offered him a chair; but the laird as usual declined it, and walked down the room to find a seat with his companion-scholars. He stopped midway however, and returned to the desk, where, standing on tip-toe, he whispered in the master's ear: "I canna come upo' the door." Then turning away again, he crept dejectedly to a seat where some of the girls had made room for him. There he took a slate, and began drawing what might seem an attempt at a door; but ever as he drew he blotted out, and nothing that could be called a door was the result. Meantime, Mr. Graham was pondering at intervals what he had said.

School being over, the laird was modestly leaving with the rest, when the master gently called him, and requested the favour of a moment more of his

company. As soon as they were alone, he took a bible from his desk, and read the words:

"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

Without comment, he closed the book, and put it away. Mr. Stewart stood staring up at him for a moment, then turned, and gently murmuring, "I canna win at the door," walked from the schoolhouse.

It was refuge the poor fellow sought—whether from temporal or spiritual foes will matter little to him who believes that the only shelter from the one is the only shelter from the other also.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BAILLIES' BARN AGAIN.

IT began to be whispered about Portlossie, that the marquis had been present at one of the fishermen's meetings—a report which variously affected the minds of those in the habit of composing them. Some regarded it as an act of espial, and much foolish talk arose about the covenanters and persecution and martyrdom. Others, especially the less worthy of those capable of public utterance, who were by this time, in virtue of that sole gift, gaining an influence of which they were altogether unworthy, attributed it to the spreading renown of the preaching and praying members of the community, and each longed for an opportunity of exercising his individual gift upon the conscience of the marquis. The soberer portion took it for an act of mere curiosity, unlikely to be repeated.

Malcolm saw that the only way of setting things right was that the marquis should go again—openly, but it was with much difficulty that he persuaded him to present himself in the assembly. Again

accompanied by his daughter and Malcolm, he did, however, once more cross the links to the Baillies' Barn. Being early they had a choice of seats, and Florimel placed herself beside a pretty young woman of gentle and troubled countenance, who sat leaning against the side of the cavern.

The preacher on this occasion was the sickly young student—more pale and haggard than ever, and half-way nearer the grave since his first sermon. He still set himself to frighten the sheep into the fold by wolfish cries; but it must be allowed that, in this sermon at least, his representations of the miseries of the lost were not by any means so gross as those usually favoured by preachers of his kind. His imagination was sensitive enough to be roused by the words of Scripture themselves, and was not dependent for stimulus upon those of Virgil, Dante, or Milton. Having taken for his text the fourteenth verse of the fifty-ninth psalm, "And at evening let them return; and let them make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city," he dwelt first upon the condition and character of the eastern dog as contrasted with those of our dogs; pointing out to his hearers, that so far from being valued for use or beauty or rarity, they were, except swine, of all

animals the most despised by the Jews—the vile outcasts of the border-land separating animals domestic and ferine—filthy, dangerous, and hated; then associating with his text that passage in the Revelation, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city; for without are dogs," he propounded, or rather asserted, that it described one variety of the many punishments of the wicked, showing at least a portion of them condemned to rush howling for ever about the walls of the New Jerusalem, haunting the gates they durst not enter.

"See them through the fog steaming up from the shores of their Phlegethon!" he cried, warming into eloquence; "—see the horrid troop, afar from the crystal walls!—if indeed ye stand on those heights of glory, and course not around them with the dogs! —hear them howl and bark as they scour along! Gaze at them more earnestly as they draw nigher; see upon the dog-heads of them the signs and symbols of rank and authority which they wore when they walked erect, men—ay, women too, among men and women! see the crown-jewels flash over the hanging ears, the tiara tower thrice-circled over

the hungry eyes! see the plumes and the coronets, the hoods and the veils!"

Here, unhappily for his eloquence, he slid off into the catalogue of women's finery given by the prophet Isaiah, at the close of which he naturally found the oratorical impulse gone, and had to sit down in the mud of an anticlimax. Presently, however, he recovered himself, and, spreading his wings, once more swung himself aloft into the empyrean of an eloquence, which, whatever else it might or might not be, was at least genuine.

"Could they but surmount those walls, whose inherent radiance is the artillery of their defence, those walls high-uplifted, whose lowest foundations are such stones as make the glory of earthly crowns; could they overleap those gates of pearl, and enter the golden streets, what think ye they would do there? Think ye they would rage hither and thither at will, making horrid havoc amongst the white-robed inhabitants of the sinless capital? Nay, verily; for, in the gold transparent as glass, they would see their own vile forms in truth-telling reflex, and, turning in agony, would rush yelling back, out again into the darkness—the outer darkness—to go round and round the city again and for evermore,

tenfold tortured henceforth with the memory of their visioned selves."

Here the girl beside Lady Florimel gave a loud cry, and fell backwards from her seat. On all sides arose noises, loud or suppressed, mingled with murmurs of expostulation. Even Lady Florimel, invaded by shrieks, had to bite her lips hard to keep herself from responding with like outcry; for scream will call forth scream, as vibrant string from its neighbour will draw the answering tone.

"Deep calleth unto deep! The wind is blowing on the slain! The Spirit is breathing on the dry bones!" shouted the preacher in an ecstacy. But one who rose from behind Lizzy Findlay, had arrived at another theory regarding the origin of the commotion—and doubtless had a right to her theory, in as much as she was a woman of experience, being no other than Mrs. Catanach.

At the sound of her voice seeking to soothe the girl, Malcolm shuddered; but the next moment, from one of those freaks of suggestion which defy analysis, he burst into laughter: he had a glimpse of a she-dog, in Mrs. Catanach's Sunday bonnet, bringing up the rear of the preacher's canine company, and his horror of the woman found relief in

an involuntary outbreak that did not spring altogether from merriment.

It attracted no attention. The cries increased; for the preacher continued to play on the harp-nerves of his hearers, in the firm belief that the Spirit was being poured out upon them. The marquis, looking very pale, for he could never endure the cry of a woman even in a play, rose, and taking Florimel by the arm, turned to leave the place. Malcolm hurried to the front to make way for them. But the preacher caught sight of the movement, and, filled with a fury which seemed to him sacred, rushed to the rescue of souls.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Go not hence, I charge you. On your lives I charge you! Turn ye, turn ye: why will ye die? There is no fleeing from Satan. You must resist the devil. He that flies is lost. If you turn your backs upon Apollyon, he will never slacken pace until he has driven you into the troop of his dogs, to go howling about the walls of the city. Stop them, friends of the cross, ere they step beyond the sound of mercy; for, alas! the voice of him who is sent cannot reach beyond the particle of time wherein he speaks: now, this one solitary moment, gleaming out of the eternity be-

fore us only to be lost in the eternity behind us—this *now* is the accepted time; *this* NOW and no other is the moment of salvation!"

Most of the men recognized the marquis; some near the entrance saw only Malcolm clearing the way: marquis or fisher, it was all the same when souls were at stake: they crowded with one consent to oppose their exit: yet another chance they must have, whether they would or not. These men were in the mood to give—not their own—but those other men's bodies to be burnt on the poorest chance of saving their souls from the everlasting burnings.

Malcolm would have been ready enough for a fight, had he and the marquis been alone, but the presence of Lady Florimel put it out of the question. Looking round, he sought the eye of his master.

Had Lord Lossie been wise, he would at once have yielded, and sat down to endure to the end. But he jumped on the form next him, and appealed to the common sense of the assembly.

"Don't you see the man is mad?" he said, pointing to the preacher. "He is foaming at the mouth. For God's sake look after your women: he will have them all in hysterics in another five

minutes. I wonder any man of sense would countenance such things!"

As to *hysterics*, the fisher folk had never heard of them; and though the words of the preacher were not those of soberness, they yet believed them the words of truth, and himself a far saner man than the marquis.

"Gien a body comes to oor meetin'," cried one of them, a fine specimen of the *argle-bargling* Scotchman—a creature known and detested over the habitable globe—"he maun just du as we du, an' sit it oot. It 's for yer sowl's guid."

The preacher, checked in full career, was standing with open mouth, ready to burst forth in a fresh flood of oratory so soon as the open channels of hearing ears should be again granted him; but all were now intent on the duel between the marquis and Jamie Ladle.

"If, the next time you came, you found the entrance barricaded," said the marquis, "what would you say to that?"

"Ow, we wad jist tak doon the sticks," answered Ladle.

"You would call it *persecution*, wouldn't you?"

"Ay; it wad be that."

"And what do you call it now, when you prevent a man from going his own way, after he has had enough of your foolery?"

"Ow, we ca' 't dissiplene!" answered the fellow.

The marquis got down, annoyed, but laughing at his own discomfiture.

"I've stopped the screaming, anyhow," he said.

Ere the preacher, the tap of whose eloquence presently began to yield again, but at first ran very slow, had gathered way enough to carry his audience with him, a woman rushed up to the mouth of the cave, the borders of her cap flapping, and her gray hair flying like an old Maenad's. Brandishing in her hand the *spurtle* with which she had been making the porridge for supper, she cried in a voice that reached every ear:

"What's this I hear o' 't! Come oot o' that, Lizzy, ye limmer! Ir ye gauin' frae ill to waur, i' the deevil's name?"

It was Meg Partan. She sent the congregation right and left from her, as a ship before the wind sends a wave from each side of her bows. Men and women gave place to her, and she went surging into the midst of the assembly.

"Whaur's that lass o' mine?" she cried, looking

about her in aggravated wrath at failing to pounce right upon her.

"She's no verra weel, Mistress Findlay," cried Mrs. Catanach, in a loud whisper, laden with an insinuating tone of intercession. "She'll be better in a meenute. The minister's jist *ower* pooerfu' the nicht."

Mrs. Findlay made a long reach, caught Lizzy by the arm, and dragged her forth, looking scared and white, with a red spot upon one cheek. No one dared to bar Meg's exit with her prize; and the marquis, with Lady Florimel and Malcolm, took advantage of the opening she made, and following in her wake soon reached the open air.

Mrs. Findlay was one of the few of the fisher women who did not approve of conventicles, being a great stickler for every authority in the country except that of husbands, in which she declared she did not believe: a report had reached her that Lizzy was one of the lawless that evening, and in hot haste she had left the porridge on the fire to drag her home.

"This is the second predicament you have got us into, MacPhail," said his lordship, as they walked along the Boar's Tail—the name by which some

designated the dune, taking the name of the rock at the end of it to be the Boar's Craig, and the last word to mean, as it often does, not *Crag*, but *Neck* like the German *kragen*, and perhaps the English *scrag*.

"I'm sorry for't, my lord," said Malcolm; "but I'm sure yer lordship had the worth o' 't in fun."

"I can't deny that," returned the marquis.

"And *I* can't get that horrid shriek out of my ears," said Lady Florimel.

"Which of them?" said her father. "There was no end to the shrieking. It nearly drove me wild."

"I mean the poor girl's who sat beside us, papa. Such a pretty nice-looking creature too! And that horrid woman close behind us all the time! I hope you won't go again, papa. They'll convert you if you do, and never ask your leave. You wouldn't like that, *I* know."

"What do you say to shutting up the place altogether?"

"*Do*, papa. It's shocking. Vulgar and horrid!"

"I wad think twise, my lord, afore I wad sair (*serve*) them as ill as they saired me."

"Did I ask your advice?" said the marquis sternly.

"It's nane the waur 'at it 's gien oonsoucht," said Malcolm. "It's the richt thing ony gait."

"You presume on this foolish report about you, I suppose, MacPhail," said his lordship; "but that won't do."

"God forgie ye, my lord, for I hae ill duin' 't! (*find it difficult*)" said Malcolm.

He left them and walked down to the foamy lip of the tide, which was just waking up from its faint recession. A cold glimmer, which seemed to come from nothing but its wetness, was all the sea had to say for itself.

But the marquis smiled, and turned his face towards the wind which was blowing from the south.

In a few moments Malcolm came back, but to follow behind them, and say nothing more that night.

The marquis did not interfere with the fishermen. Having heard of their rudeness, Mr. Cairns called again, and pressed him to end the whole thing; but he said they would only be after something worse, and refused.

The turn things had taken that night determined their after course. Cryings out and faintings grew common, and fits began to appear. A few laid claim to visions,—bearing, it must be remarked, a

strong resemblance to the similitudes, metaphors, and more extended poetic figures, employed by the young preacher, becoming at length a little more original and a good deal more grotesque. They took to dancing at last, not by any means the least healthful mode of working off their excitement. It was, however, hardly more than a dull beating of time to the monotonous chanting of a few religious phrases, rendered painfully commonplace by senseless repetition.

I would not be supposed to deny the genuineness of the emotion, or even of the religion, in many who thus gave show to their feelings. But neither those who were good before nor those who were excited now were much the better for this and like modes of playing off the mental electricity generated by the revolving cylinder of intercourse. Naturally, such men as Joseph Mair now grew shy of the assemblies they had helped to originate, and withdrew—at least into the background; the reins slipped from the hands of the first leaders, and such wind-bags as Ladle got up to drive the chariot of the gospel—with the results that could not fail to follow. At the same time it must be granted that the improvement of their habits, in

so far as strong drink was concerned, continued: it became almost a test of faith with them, whether or not a man was a total abstainer. Hence their moral manners, so to say, improved greatly; there were no more public-house orgies, no fighting in the streets, very little of what they called breaking of the Sabbath, and altogether there was a marked improvement in the look of things along a good many miles of that northern shore.

Strange as it may seem, however, morality, in the deeper sense, remained very much at the same low ebb as before. It is much easier to persuade men that God cares for certain observances, than that he cares for simple honesty and truth and gentleness and loving-kindness. The man who would shudder at the idea of a rough word of the description commonly called swearing, will not even have a twinge of conscience after a whole morning of ill-tempered sullenness, capricious scolding, villainously unfair animadversion, or surly cross-grained treatment generally of wife and children! Such a man will omit neither family worship nor a sneer at his neighbour. He will neither milk his cow on the first day of the week without a Sabbath mask on his face, nor remove it while he waters

the milk for his customers. Yet he may not be an absolute hypocrite. What can be done for him, however, hell itself may have to determine.

Notwithstanding their spiritual experiences, it was, for instance, no easier to get them to pay their debts than heretofore. Of course there were, and had always been, thoroughly honest men and women amongst them; but there were others who took prominent part in their observances, who seemed to have no remotest suspicion that religion had anything to do with money or money's worth,—not to know that God cared whether a child of his met his obligations or not. Such fulfilled the injunction to owe nothing by acknowledging nothing. One man, when pressed, gave as a reason for his refusal, that Christ had paid all his debts. Possibly this contemptible state of feeling had been fostered by an old superstition that it was unlucky to pay up everything, whence they had always been in the habit of leaving at least a few shillings of their shop-bills to be carried forward to the settlement after the next fishing season. But when a widow, whose husband had left property, would acknowledge no obligation to discharge his debts, it came to be rather more than a whim. Evidently the

religion of many of them was as yet of a poor sort,—precisely like that of the negroes, whose devotion so far outstrips their morality.

If there had but been some one of themselves to teach that the true outlet and sedative of overstrained feeling is right action! that the performance of an unpleasant duty, say the paying of their debts, was a far more effectual as well as more specially religious mode of working off their excitement than dancing! that feeling is but the servant of character until it becomes its child! or rather, that feeling is but a mere vapour until condensed into character! that the *only* process through which it can be thus consolidated is well-doing—the putting forth of the right thing according to the conscience universal and individual! and that thus, and thus only, can the veil be withdrawn from between the man and his God, and the man be saved in beholding the face of his Father!

"But have patience—give them time," said Mr. Graham, who had watched the whole thing from the beginning. "If their religion is religion, it will work till it purifies; if it is not, it will show itself for what it is, by plunging them into open vice. The mere excitement and its extravagance—the mode

in which their gladness breaks out—means nothing either way. *The man* is the willing, performing being, not the feeling, shouting, singing being: in the latter there may be no individuality—nothing more than receptivity of the movement of the mass. But when a man gets up and goes out and discharges an obligation, he is an individual; to him God has spoken, and he has opened his ears to hear: God and that man are henceforth in communion."

These doings, however, gave—how should they fail to give?—a strong handle to the grasp of those who cared for nothing in religion but its respectability—who went to church, Sunday after Sunday, "for the sake of example," as they said—the most arrogant of Pharisaical reasons! Many a screeching, dancing fisher-lass in the Seaton was far nearer the kingdom of heaven than the most respectable of such respectable people! I would unspeakably rather dance with the wildest of fanatics rejoicing over a change in their own spirits, than sit in the seat of the dull of heart, to whom the old story is an outworn tale.

CHAPTER V.

MOUNT PISGAH.

THE intercourse between Florimel and Malcolm grew gradually more familiar, until at length it was often hardly to be distinguished from such as takes place between equals, and Florimel was by degrees forgetting the present condition in the possible future of the young man. But Malcolm, on the other hand, as often as the thought of that possible future arose in her presence, flung it from him in horror, lest the wild dream of winning her should make him for a moment desire its realization.

The claim that hung over him haunted his very life, turning the currents of his thought into channels of speculation unknown before. Imagine a young fisherman meditating—as he wandered with bent head through the wilder woods on the steep banks of the burn, or the little green levels which it overflowed in winter—of all possible subjects, what analogy there might be twixt the body and the soul in respect of derivation—whether the soul was *traduced* as well as the body!—as his material form

came from the forms of his father and mother, did his soul come from their souls? or did the Maker, as at the first he breathed his breath into the form of Adam, still, at some crisis unknown in its creation, breathe into each form the breath of individual being? If the latter theory were the true, then, be his earthly origin what it might, he had but to shuffle off this mortal coil to walk forth a clean thing, as a prince might cast off the rags of an enforced disguise, and set out for the land of his birth. If the former were the true, then the well-spring of his being was polluted, nor might he by any death fling aside his degradation, or show himself other than defiled in the eyes of the old dwellers in "those high countries," where all things seem as they are, and are as they seem.

One day when, these questions fighting in his heart, he had for the hundredth time arrived thus far, all at once it seemed as if a soundless voice in the depth of his soul replied—

"Even then—should the well-spring of thy life be polluted with vilest horrors such as, in Persian legends, the lips of the lost are doomed to drink with loathings inconceivable—the well is but the utterance of the water, not the source of its exist-

ence; the rain is its father, and comes from the sweet heavens. Thy soul, however it became known to itself, is from the pure heart of God, whose thought of thee is older than thy being—is its first and eldest cause. Thy essence cannot be defiled, for in him it is eternal."

Even with the thought, the horizon of his life began to clear; a light came out on the far edge of its ocean—a dull and sombre yellow, it is true, and the clouds hung yet heavy over sea and land, while miles of vapour hid the sky; but he could now believe there might be a blue beyond, in which the sun lorded it with majesty.

He had been rambling on the waste hill in which the grounds of Lossie House, as it were, dissipated. It had a far outlook, but he had beheld neither sky nor ocean. The Soutars of Cromarty had all the time sat on their stools large in his view; the hills of Sutherland had invited his gaze, rising faint and clear over the darkened water at their base, less solid than the sky in which they were set, and less a fact than the clouds that crossed their breasts; the land of Caithness had lain lowly and afar, as if, weary of great things, it had crept away in tired humility to the rigours of the north; and east and

west his own rugged shore had gone lengthening out, fringed with the white burst of the dark sea; but none of all these things had he noted.

Lady Florimel suddenly encountered him on his way home, and was startled by his look.

"Where *have* you been, Malcolm?" she exclaimed.

"I hardly ken, my leddy: somewhaur aboot the feet o' Mount Pisgah, I'm thinkin', if no freely upo' the heid o' 't."

"That's not the name of the hill up there!"

"Ow na; yon's the Binn."

"What have you been about? Looking at things in general, I suppose."

"Na; they've been luikin' at me, I daursay; but I didna heed them, an' they didna fash me."

"You look so strangely bright!" she said, "as if you had seen something both marvellous and beautiful!"

The words revealed a quality of insight not hitherto manifested by Florimel. In truth, Malcolm's whole being was irradiated by the flash of inward peace that had just visited him—a statement intelligible and therefore credible enough to the mind accustomed to look over the battlements of the walls that clasp the fair windows of the senses.

But Florimel's insight had reached its limit, and her judgment, vainly endeavouring to penetrate farther, fell floundering in the mud.

"I know!" she went on: "—You've been to see your lady mother!"

Malcolm's face turned white as if blasted with leprosy. The same scourge that had maddened the poor laird fell hissing on his soul, and its knotted sting was the same word *mother*. He turned and walked slowly away, fighting a tyrannous impulse to thrust his fingers in his ears and run and shriek.

"Where are your manners?" cried the girl after him, but he never stayed his slow foot or turned his bowed head, and Florimel wondered.

For the moment, his new-found peace had vanished. Even if the old nobility of heaven might regard him without a shadow of condescension—that self-righteous form of contempt—what could he do with a mother whom he could neither honour nor love? Love! If he could but cease to hate her! There was no question yet of loving.

But might she not repent? Ah, then, indeed! And might he not help her to repent?—He would not avoid her. How was it that she had never yet sought him?

As he brooded thus, on his way to Duncan's cottage, and, heedless of the sound of coming wheels, was crossing the road which went along the bottom of the glen, he was nearly run over by a carriage coming round the corner of a high bank at a fast trot. Catching one glimpse of the face of its occupant, as it passed within a yard of his own, he turned and fled back through the woods, with again a horrible impulse to howl to the winds the cry of the mad laird: "I dinna ken whaur I cam frae!" When he came to himself, he found his hands pressed hard on his ears, and for a moment felt a sickening certainty that he too was a son of the lady of Gersefell.

When he returned at length to the House, Mrs. Courthope informed him that Mrs. Stewart had called, and seen both the marquis and Lady Florimel.

Meantime he had grown again a little anxious about the laird, but as Phemy plainly avoided him, had concluded that he had found another concealment, and that the child preferred not being questioned concerning it.

With the library of Lossie House at his disposal, and almost nothing to do, it might now have been

a grand time for Malcolm's studies; but alas! he too often found it all but impossible to keep his thoughts on the track of a thought through a single sentence of any length.

The autumn now hung over the verge of its grave. Hoar frost, thick on the fields, made its mornings look as if they had turned gray with fear. But when the sun arose, grayness and fear vanished: the back-thrown smile of the departing glory was enough to turn old age into a memory of youth. Summer was indeed gone, and winter was nigh with its storms and its fogs and its rotting rains and its drifting snows, but the sun was yet in the heavens, and, changed as was his manner towards her, would yet have many a half smile for the poor old earth —enough to keep her alive until he returned, bringing her youth with him. To the man who believes that the winter is but for the sake of the summer, exists only in virtue of the summer at its heart, no winter, outside or in, can be unendurable. But Malcolm sorely missed the ministrations of compulsion: he lacked labour—the most helpful and most healing of all God's holy things, of which we so often lose the heavenly benefit by labouring inordinately that we may rise above the earthly need of it. How

many sighs are wasted over the toil of the sickly —a toil which perhaps lifts off half the weight of their sickness, elevates their inner life, and makes the outer pass with tenfold rapidity. Of those who honestly pity such, many would themselves be far less pitiable were they compelled to share in the toil they behold with compassion. They are unaware of the healing virtue which the thing they would not pity at all were it a matter of choice, gains from the compulsion of necessity.

All over the house big fires were glowing and blazing. Nothing pleased the marquis worse than the least appearance of stinting the consumption of coal. In the library two huge gratefuls were burning from dawn to midnight—well for the books anyhow, if their owner seldom showed his face amongst them. There were days during which, except the servant whose duty it was to attend to the fires, not a creature entered the room but Malcolm. To him it was as the cave of Aladdin to the worshipper of Mammon, and yet now he would often sit down indifferent to its hoarded splendours, and gather no jewels.

But one morning, as he sat there alone, in an oriel looking sea-wards, there lay on a table before

him a thin folio, containing the chief works of Sir Thomas Brown—amongst the rest his well-known Religio Medici, from which he had just read the following passage:—

"When I take a full view and circle of myself, without this reasonable moderatour, and equall piece of justice, Death, I doe conceive my self the most miserablest person extant; were there not another life that I hoped for, all the vanities of this world should not intreat a moment's breath from me; could the Devil work my belief to imagine I could never die, I would not outlive that very thought; I have so abject a conceit of this common way of existence, this retaining to the Sun and elements, I cannot think this is to be a man, or to live according to the dignity of humanity. In expectation of a better, I can with patience embrace this life, yet in my best meditations do often desire death; I honour any man that contemnes it, nor can I highly love any that is afraid of it: this makes me naturally love a Soldier, and honour those tatter'd and contemptible Regiments that will die at the command of a Sergeant."

These words so fell in with the prevailing mood of his mind, that having gathered them, they grew

upon him, and as he pondered them, he sat gazing out on the bright blowing autumn day. The sky was dimmed with a clear pallor, across which small white clouds were driving ; the yellow leaves that yet clave to the twigs were few, and the wind swept through the branches with a hiss. The far-off sea was alive with multitudinous white—the rush of the jubilant over-sea across the blue plain. All without was merry, healthy, radiant, strong; in his mind brooded a single haunting thought that already had almost filled his horizon, threatening by exclusion to become madness! Why should he not leave the place, and the horrors of his history with it? Then the hideous hydra might unfold itself as it pleased ; he would find at least a better fortune than his birth had endowed him withal.

Lady Florimel entered in search of something to read: to her surprise, for she had heard of no arrival, in one of the windows sat a highland gentleman, looking out on the landscape. She was on the point of retiring again, when a slight movement revealed Malcolm.

The explanation was, that the marquis, their seafaring over, had at length persuaded Malcolm to don the highland attire: it was an old custom of

the house of Lossie that its lord's henchman should be thus distinguished, and the marquis himself wore the kilt when on his western estates in the summer, also as often as he went to court,—would indeed have worn it always but that he was no longer hardy enough. He would not have succeeded with Malcolm, however, but for the youth's love to Duncan, the fervent heat of which vaporized the dark heavy stone of obligation into the purple vapour of gratitude, and enhanced the desire of pleasing him until it became almost a passion. Obligation is a ponderous roll of canvas which Love spreads aloft into a tent wherein he delights to dwell.

This was his first appearance in the garments of Duncan's race. It was no little trial to him to assume them in the changed aspect of his circumstances; for alas! he wore them in right of service only, not of birth, and the tartan of his lord's family was all he could claim.

He had not heard Lady Florimel enter. She went softly up behind him, and laid her hand on his shoulder. He started to his feet.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said, retreating a step or two.

"I wad gie twa to be rid o' them," he returned,

shaking his bushy head as if to scare the invisible ravens hovering about it.

"How fine you are!" Florimel went on, regarding him with an approbation too open to be altogether gratifying. "—The dress suits you thoroughly. I didn't know you at first. I thought it must be some friend of papa's. Now I remember he said once you must wear the proper dress for a henchman. How do you like it?"

"It's a' ane to me," said Malcolm. "I dinna care what I weir.—Gien only I had a richt till 't!" he added with a sigh.

"It is too bad of you, Malcolm!" rejoined Florimel in a tone of rebuke. "The moment fortune offers you favour, you fall out with her—won't give her a single smile. You don't deserve your good luck."

Malcolm was silent.

"There's something on your mind," Florimel went on, partly from willingness to serve Mrs. Stewart, partly enticed by the romance of being Malcolm's comforter, or perhaps confessor.

"Ay is there, my leddy."

"What is it? Tell me. You can trust me?"

"I could trust ye, but I canna tell ye. I daurna —I maunna."

"I see you will not trust me," said Florimel, with a half pretended, half real offence.

"I wad lay doon my life—what there is o' 't—for ye, my leddy; but the verra natur o' my trouble winna be tauld. I maun beir 't my lane."

It flashed across Lady Florimel's brain, that the cause of his misery, the thing he dared not confess, was love of herself. Now, Malcolm, standing before her in his present dress, and interpreted by the knowledge she believed she had of his history, was a very different person indeed from the former Malcolm in the guise of fisherman or sailor, and she felt as well as saw the difference: if she was the cause of his misery, why should she not comfort him a little? why should she not be kind to him? Of course anything more was out of the question; but a little confession and consolation would hurt neither of them. Besides, Mrs. Stewart had begged her influence, and this would open a new channel for its exercise. Indeed, if he was unhappy through her, she ought to do what she might for him. A gentle word or two would cost her nothing, and might help to heal a broken heart! She was hardly aware, however, how little she wanted it healed—all at once.

For the potency of a thought it is perhaps even better that it should not be logically displayed to the intellect; anyhow the germ of all this, undeveloped into the definite forms I have given, sufficed to the determining of Florimel's behaviour. I do not mean that she had more than the natural tendency of womankind to enjoy the emotions of which she was the object; but besides the one in the fable, there are many women with a tendency to mousing; and the idea of deriving pleasure from the sufferings of a handsome youth was not quite so repulsive to her as it ought to have been. At the same time, as there cannot be many cats capable of understanding the agonies of the mice within reach of their waving whiskers, probably many cat-women are not quite so cruel as they seem.

"*Can't* you trust me, Malcolm?" she said, looking in his eyes very sweetly, and bending a little towards him; "—*Can't* you trust me?"

At the words and the look it seemed as if his frame melted to ether. He dropped on his knees, and, his heart half stifled in the confluence of the tides of love and misery, sighed out between the pulses in his throat:

"There's naething I could na tell ye 'at ever I thoucht or did i' my life, my leddy; but it's ither fowk, my leddy! It's like to burn a hole i' my hert, an' yet I daurna open my mou'."

There was a half angelic, half dog-like entreaty in his up-looking hazel eyes that seemed to draw hers down into his: she must put a stop to that.

"Get up, Malcolm," she said kindly: "what would my father or Mrs. Courthope think?"

"I dinna ken, an' I 'maist dinna care; atween ae thing an' anither I'm nearhan' distrackit," answered Malcolm, rising slowly, but not taking his eyes from her face. "An' there's my daddy!" he went on, "—maist won ower to the enemy!—an' I daurna tell even him what for I canna bide it!—*Ye* haena been sayin' onything till him—hiv ye, my leddy?"

"I don't quite understand you," returned Florimel, rather guiltily, for she had spoken on the subject to Duncan. "Saying anything to your grandfather? About what?"

"Aboot—aboot—*her*, ye ken, my lady."

"What her?" asked Florimel.

"Her 'at—— The leddy o' Gersefell."

"And why——? What of her? Why, Malcolm!

what can have possessed you? You seem actually to dislike her!"

"I canna bide her," said Malcolm, with the calm earnestness of one who is merely stating an incontrovertible fact, and for a moment his eyes, at once troubled and solemn, kept looking wistfully in hers, as if searching for a comfort too good to be found, then slowly sank and sought the floor at her feet.

"And why?"

"I canna tell ye."

She supposed it an unreasoned antipathy.

"But that is very wrong," she said, almost as if rebuking a child. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. What!—dislike your own mother?"

"Dinna say the word, my leddy," cried Malcolm in a tone of agony, "or ye'll gar me skirl an' rin like the mad laird. He 's no a hair madder nor I wad be wi' sic a mither."

He would have passed her to leave the room.

But Lady Florimel could not bear defeat. In any contest she must win or be shamed in her own eyes, and was she to gain absolutely nothing in such a passage with a fisher lad? Was the billow of her persuasion to fall back from such a rock,

self-beaten into poorest foam? She would, she must subdue him! Perhaps she did not know how much the sides of her intent were pricked by the nettling discovery that she was not the cause of his unhappiness.

"You're not going to leave me so!" she exclaimed, in a tone of injury.

"I'll gang or bide as ye wull, my leddy," answered Malcolm resignedly.

"Bide then," she returned. "—I haven't half done with you yet."

"Ye maunna jist tear my hert oot," he rejoined —with a sad half smile, and another of his dog-like looks.

"That's what you would do to your mother!" said Florimel severely.

"Say nae ill o' my mither!" cried Malcolm, suddenly changing almost to fierceness.

"Why, Malcolm!" said Florimel, bewildered, "what ill was I saying of her?"

"It's naething less than an in*sult* to my mither to ca' yon wuman by her name," he replied with set teeth.

It was to him an offence against the idea of motherhood—against the mother he had so often

imagined luminous against the dull blank of memory, to call such a woman his mother.

"She's a very ladylike, handsome woman—handsome enough to be *your* mother even, Mr. Malcolm Stewart."

Florimel could not have dared the words but for the distance between them; but, then, neither would she have said them while the distance was greater! They were lost on Malcolm though, for, never in his life having started the question whether he was handsome or not, he merely supposed her making game of him, and drew himself together in silence, with the air of one bracing himself to hear and endure the worst.

"Even if she should not be your mother," his tormentor resumed, "—to show such a dislike to any woman is nothing less than cruelty."

"She maun pruv' 't," murmured Malcolm—not the less emphatically that the words were but just audible.

"Of course she will do that; she has abundance of proof. She gave me a whole hour of proof."

"Lang's no strang," returned Malcolm: "there's comfort i' that! Gang on, my leddy."

"Poor woman! it was hard enough to lose her

son; but to find him again such as you seem likely to turn out, *I* should think ten times worse."

"Nae doobt! nae doobt!—But there's ae thing waur."

"What is that?"

"To come upon a mither 'at——"

He stopped abruptly; his eyes went wandering about the room, and the muscles of his face worked convulsively.

Florimel saw that she had been driving against a stone wall. She paused a moment, and then resumed.

"Anyhow, if she *is* your mother," she said, "nothing you can do will alter it."

"She maun pruv' 't," was all Malcolm's dogged reply.

"Just so; and if she can't," said Florimel, "you'll be no worse than you were before—and no better," she added with a sigh.

Malcolm lifted his questioning to her searching eyes.

"Don't you see," she went on, very softly, and lowering her look, from the half-conscious shame of half-unconscious falseness, "I can't be all my life here at Lossie? We shall have to say good-bye to

each other—never to meet again, most likely. But if you should turn out to be of good family, you know,—"

Florimel saw neither the paling of his brown cheek nor the great surge of red that followed, but, glancing up to spy the effect of her argument, did see the lightning that broke from the darkened hazel of his eyes, and again cast down her own.

"—then there might be some chance," she went on, "of our meeting somewhere—in London, or perhaps in Edinburgh, and I could ask you to my house—after I was married, you know."

Heaven and earth seemed to close with a snap around his brain. The next moment, they had receded an immeasurable distance, and in limitless wastes of exhausted being he stood alone. What time had passed when he came to himself, he had not an idea; it might have been hours for anything his consciousness was able to tell him. But, although he recalled nothing of what she had been urging, he grew aware that Lady Florimel's voice which was now in his ears, had been sounding in them all the time. He was standing before her like a marble statue with a dumb thrill in its helpless heart of stone. He must end this! Parting was bad enough, but

an endless parting was unendurable! To know that measureless impassable leagues lay between them, and yet to be for ever in the shroud of a cold leave-taking!—To look in her eyes, and know that she was not there! A parting that never broke the bodily presence—that was the form of agony which the infinite moment assumed. As to the possibility she would bribe him with—it was not even the promise of a glimpse of Abraham's bosom from the heart of hell. With such an effort as breaks the bonds of a nightmare dream, he turned from her, and, heedless of her recall, went slowly, steadily, out of the house.

While she was talking, his eyes had been resting with glassy gaze upon the far off waters: the moment he stepped into the open air, and felt the wind on his face, he knew that their turmoil was the travailing of sympathy, and that the ocean had been drawing him all the time. He walked straight to his little boat, lying dead on the sands of the harbour, launched it alive on the smooth water within the piers, rove his halliard, stepped his mast, hoisted a few inches of sail, pulled beyond the sheltering sea-walls, and was tossing amidst the torn waters whose jagged edges were

twisted in the loose-flying threads of the northern gale. A moment more, and he was sitting on the windward gunwale of his spoon of a boat, with the tiller in one hand and the sheet in the other, as she danced like a cork over the broken tops of the waves. For help in his sore need, instinct had led him to danger.

Half way to the point of Scaurnose, he came round on the other tack, and stood for the Death Head.

Glancing from the wallowing floor beneath him, and the one wing that bore him skimming over its million deaths, away to the House of Lossie, where it stood steady in its woods, he distinguished the very window whence, hardly an hour ago, from the centre of the calm companionship of books, he had gazed out upon the wind-swept waste as upon a dream.

"How strange," he thought, "to find myself now in the midst of what I then but saw! This reeling ocean was but a picture to me then—a picture framed in the window; it is now alive and I toss like a toy on its wild commotion! Then I but saw from afar the flashing of the white out of the blue water, and the blue sky overhead, which no winds

can rend into pallid pains; now I have to keep eye and hand together in one consent to shun death; I meet wind and wave on their own terms, and humour the one into an evasion of the other. The wind that then revealed itself only in white blots and streaks now lashes my hair into my eyes, and only the lift of my bows is betwixt me and the throat that swallows the whales and the krakens.

"Will it be so with death? It looks strange and far off now, but it draws nigh noiselessly, and one day I meet it face to face in the grapple: shall I rejoice in that wrestle as I rejoice in this? Will not my heart grow sick within me? Shall I not be faint and fearful? And yet I could almost wish it were at hand!

"I wonder how death and this wan water here look to God! To him is it like a dream—a picture? Water cannot wet him; death cannot touch him. Yet Jesus could have let the water wet him; and he granted power to death when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. God knows how things look to us both far off and near; he also can see them so when he pleases. What they look to him is what they are: we cannot see them so, but we see them as he meant us to see them,

therefore truly, according to the measure of the created. Made in the image of God, we see things in the image of his sight."

Thoughts like these, only in yet cruder forms, swept through the mind of Malcolm as he tossed on that autumn sea. But what we call crude forms are often in reality germinal forms; and one or other of these flowered at once into the practical conclusion, that God must know all his trouble, and would work for him a worthy peace. Ere he turned again towards the harbour, he had reascended the cloud-haunted Pisgah whence the words of Lady Florimel had hurled him.

CHAPTER VI.

LIZZY FINDLAY.

LEAVING his boat again on the dry sand that sloped steep into the harbour, Malcolm took his way homeward along the shore. Presently he spied, at some little distance in front of him, a woman sitting on the sand, with her head bowed upon her knees. She had no shawl, though the wind was cold and strong, blowing her hair about wildly. Her attitude and whole appearance were the very picture of misery. He drew near, and recognized her.

"What on earth's gane wrang wi' ye, Lizzy?" he asked.

"Ow naething," she murmured, without lifting her head. The brief reply was broken by a sob.

"That canna be," persisted Malcolm, trouble of whose own had never yet rendered him indifferent to that of another. "Is 't onything 'at a body cud stan' by ye in?"

Another sob was the only answer.

"I 'm in a peck o' troubles mysel'," said Malcolm. "I wad fain help a body gien I cud."

"Naebody can help me," returned the girl, with an agonized burst, as if the words were driven from her by a convulsion of her inner world, and therewith she gave way, weeping and sobbing aloud.—"I doobt I'll hae to droon mysel'," she added with a wail, as he stood in compassionate silence, until the gust should blow over; and as she said it, she lifted a face tear-stained, and all white save where five fingers had branded their shapes in red. Her eyes scarcely encountered his; again she buried her face in her hands, and rocked herself to and fro, moaning in fresh agony.

"Yer mither's been sair upo' ye, I doobt!" he said. "But it'll sune blaw ower. She cuils as fest 's she heats."

As he spoke he set himself down on the sand beside her. But Lizzy started to her feet, crying,

"Dinna come near me, Ma'colm. I'm no fit for honest man to come nigh me. Stan' awa'; I hae the plague."

She laughed, but it was a pitiful laugh, and she looked wildly about, as if for some place to run to.

"I wad na be sorry to tak it mysel', Lizzy. At ony rate I'm ower auld a freen' to be driven

frae ye that gait," said Malcolm, who could not bear the thought of leaving her on the border of the solitary sea, with the waves barking at her all the cold winterly gloamin'. Who could tell what she might do after the dark came down? He rose, and would have taken her hand to draw it from her face; but she turned her back quickly, saying in a hard forced voice:

"A man canna help a wuman—'cep it be till her grave." Then turning suddenly, she laid her hands on his shoulders, and cried: "For the love o' God, Ma'colm, lea' me this moment! Gien I cud tell ony man what ailed me, I wad tell you; but I canna, I canna! Rin, laddie; rin' an' lea' me."

It was impossible to resist her anguished entreaty and agonized look. Sore at heart and puzzled in brain, Malcolm yielding turned from her, and with eyes on the ground, thoughtfully pursued his slow walk towards the Seaton.

At the corner of the first house in the village stood three women, whom he saluted as he passed. The tone of their reply struck him a little, but, not having observed how they watched him as he approached, he presently forgot it. The moment his back was

turned to them, they turned to each other and interchanged looks.

"Fine feathers mak fine birds," said one of them.

"Ay, but he luiks booed doon," said another.

"An' weel he may! What 'll his leddy-mither say to sic a ploy? She 'll no sawvour bein' made a granny o' efter sic a fashion 's yon," said the third.

"'Deed, lass, there's feow oucht to think less o' 't," returned the first.

Although they took little pains to lower their voices, Malcolm was far too much preoccupied to hear what they said. Perceiving plainly enough that the girl's trouble was much greater than a passing quarrel with her mother would account for, and knowing that any intercession on his part would only rouse to loftier flames the coal-pits of maternal wrath, he resolved at length to take counsel with Blue Peter and his wife, and therefore, passing the sea-gate, continued his walk along the shore, and up the red path to the village of Scaurnose.

He found them sitting at their afternoon meal of tea and oatcake. A peat fire smouldered hot upon the hearth; a large kettle hung from a chain over it—fountain of plenty, whence the great china teapot, splendid in red flowers and green leaves, had

just been filled; the mantelpiece was crowded with the gayest of crockery, including the never-absent half-shaved poodles, and the rarer Gothic castle, from the topmost story of whose keep bloomed a few late autumn flowers. Phemy too was at the table: she rose as if to leave the room, but apparently changed her mind, for she sat down again instantly.

"Man, ye're unco braw the day—i' yer kilt an' tartan hose!" remarked Mair as he welcomed him.

"I pat them on to please my daddy an' the markis," said Malcolm, with a half shame-faced laugh.

"Are na ye some cauld aboot the k-nees?" asked the guidwife.

"Nae that cauld! I ken 'at they're there; but I'll sune be used till 't."

"Weel, sit ye doon an' tak a cup o' tay wi' 's."

"I haena muckle time to spare," said Malcolm; "but I'll tak a cup o' tay wi' ye. Gien 't warna for wee bit luggies (*small ears*) I wad fain speir yer advice aboot ane 'at wants a wuman-freen', I'm thinkin'."

Phemy, who had been regarding him with compressed lips and suspended operations, deposited

her bread and butter on the table, and slipped from her chair.

"Whaur are ye gauin', Phemy?" said her mother.

"Takin' awa' my lugs," returned Phemy.

"Ye cratur!" exclaimed Malcolm; "ye're ower wise. Wha wad hae thoucht ye sae gleg at the uptak!"

"Whan fowk winna lippen to me—" said Phemy and ceased.

"What can ye expec," returned Malcolm, while father and mother listened with amused faces—"whan ye winna lippen to fowk?—Phemy, whaur's the mad laird?"

A light flush rose to her cheeks, but whether from embarrassment or anger could not be told from her reply.

"I ken nane o' that name," she said.

"Whaur's the laird o' Kirkbyres, than?"

"Whaur ye s' never lay han' upo' 'im!" returned the child, her cheeks now rosy-red, and her eyes flashing.

"*Me* lay han' upo' 'im!" cried Malcolm, surprised at her behaviour.

"Gien 't hadna been for you, naebody wad hae fun' oot the w'y intil the cave," she rejoined, her

gray eyes, blue with the fire of anger, looking straight into his.

"Phemy! Phemy!" said her mother. "For shame!"

"There's nae shame intill 't," protested the child indignantly.

"But there *is* shame intill 't," said Malcolm quietly, "for ye wrang an honest man."

"Weel, ye canna deny," persisted Phemy, in mood to brave the evil one himself, "'at ye was ower at Kirkbyres on ane o' the markis's mears, an' heild a lang confab wi' the laird's mither!"

"I gaed upo' my maister's eeran'," answered Malcolm.

"Ow, ay! I daursay!—But wha kens—wi' sic a mither!"

She burst out crying, and ran into the street.

Malcolm understood it now.

"She's like a' the lave (*rest*)!" he said sadly, turning to her mother.

"I'm jist affrontit wi' the bairn!" she replied, with manifest annoyance in her flushed face.

"She's true to *him*," said Malcolm, "gien she binna fair to *me*. Sayna a word to the lassie. She'll ken me better or lang. An' noo for my story."

Mrs. Mair said nothing while he told how he had come upon Lizzy, the state she was in, and what had passed between them; but he had scarcely finished, when she rose, leaving a cup of tea untasted, and took her bonnet and shawl from a nail in the back of the door. Her husband rose also.

"I 'll jist gang as far 's the Boar's Craig wi' ye mysel', Annie," he said.

"I 'm thinkin' ye'll fin' the puir lassie whaur I left her," remarked Malcolm. "I doobt she daured na gang hame."

That night it was all over the town, that Lizzy Findlay was in a woman's worst trouble, and that Malcolm was the cause of it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAIRD'S BURROW.

ANNIE MAIR had a brother, a carpenter, who, following her to Scaurnose, had there rented a small building next door to her cottage, and made of it a workshop. It had a rude loft, one end of which was loosely floored, while the remaining part showed the couples through the bare joists, except where some planks of oak and mahogany, with an old door, a boat's rudder, and other things that might come in handy, were laid across them in store. There also, during the winter, hung the cumulus-clouds of Blue Peter's herring-nets; for his cottage, having a garret above, did not afford the customary place for them in the roof.

When the cave proved to be no longer a secret from the laird's enemies, Phemy, knowing that her father's garret could never afford him a sufficing sense of security, turned the matter over in her active little brain until pondering produced plans, and she betook herself to her uncle, with whom she was a great favourite. Him she found no difficulty

in persuading to grant the hunted man a refuge in the loft. In a few days he had put up a partition between the part which was floored and that which was open, and so made for him a little room, accessible from the shop by a ladder and a trap-door. He had just taken down an old window-frame to glaze for it, when the laird coming in and seeing what he was about, scrambled up the ladder, and, a moment after, all but tumbled down again in his eagerness to put a stop to it: the window was in the gable, looking to the south, and he would not have it glazed.

In blessed compensation for much of the misery of his lot, the laird was gifted with an inborn delicate delight in nature and her ministrations such as few poets even possess; and this faculty was supplemented with a physical hardiness which, in association with his weakness and liability to certain appalling attacks, was truly astonishing. Though a rough hand might cause him exquisite pain, he could sleep soundly on the hardest floor; a hot room would induce a fit, but he would lie under an open window in the sharpest night without injury; a rude word would make him droop like a flower in frost, but he might go all day wet to

the skin without taking cold. To all kinds of what are called hardships, he had readily become inured, without which it would have been impossible for his love of nature to receive such a full development. For hence he grew capable of communion with her in all her moods, undisabled either by the deadening effects of present, or the aversion consequent on past suffering. All the range of earth's shows, from the grandeurs of sunrise or thunderstorm down to the soft unfolding of a daisy or the babbling birth of a spring, was to him an open book. It is true, the delight of these things was constantly mingled with, not unfrequently broken, indeed, by the troublous question of his origin; but it was only on occasions of jarring contact with his fellows, that it was accompanied by such agonies as my story has represented. Sometimes he would sit on a rock, murmuring the words over and over, and dabbling his bare feet, small and delicately formed, in the translucent green of a tide-abandoned pool. But oftener in a soft dusky wind, he might have been heard uttering them gently and coaxingly, as if he would wile from the evening zephyr the secret of his birth—which surely mother Nature must know. The confinement of such a

man would have been in the highest degree cruel, and must speedily have ended in death. Even Malcolm did not know how absolute was the laird's need, not simply of air and freedom, but of all things accompanying the enjoyment of them.

There was nothing then of insanity in his preference of a windowless bedroom;—it was that airs and odours, birds and sunlight—the sound of flapping wing, of breaking wave, and quivering throat, might be free to enter. Cool clean air he must breathe, or die; with that, the partial confinement to which he was subjected was not unendurable; besides, the welcome rain would then visit him sometimes, alighting from the slant wing of the flying blast; while the sun would pour in his rays full and mighty and generous, unsifted by the presumptuous glass—green and gray and crowded with distorting lines; and the sharp flap of pigeon's wing would be mimic thunder to the flash which leapt from its whiteness as it shot by.

He not only loved but understood all the creatures, divining by an operation in which neither the sympathy nor the watchfulness was the less perfect that both were but half conscious, the emotions and desires informing their inarticulate language. Many

of them seemed to know him in return—either recognizing his person, and from experience deducing safety, or reading his countenance sufficiently to perceive that his interest prognosticated no injury. The maternal bird would keep her seat in her nursery, and give back his gaze; the rabbit peeping from his burrow would not even draw in his head at his approach; the rooks about Scaurnose never took to their wings until he was within a yard or two of them: the laird, in his half-acted utterance, indicated that they took him for a scarecrow, and *therefore* were not afraid of him. Even Mrs. Catanach's cur had never offered him a bite in return for a caress. He could make a bird's nest, of any sort common in the neighbourhood, so as to deceive the most cunning of the nest-harrying youths of the parish.*

Hardly was he an hour in his new abode ere the sparrows and robins began to visit him. Even strange birds of passage flying in at his hospitable window, would espy him unscared, and sometimes partake of the food he had always at hand to offer them. He relied, indeed, for the pleasures of social

* See article *Martin Féreoi*, in *St. Paul's Magazine*, vol. iv. generally.

intercourse with the animal world, on stray visits alone; he had no pets—dog nor cat nor bird; for his wandering and danger-haunted life did not allow such companionship.

He insisted on occupying his new quarters at once. In vain Phemy and her uncle showed reason against it. He did not want a bed; he much preferred a heap of *spales*, that is, wood-shavings. Indeed, he would not have a bed; and whatever he did want he would get for himself. Having by word and gesture made this much plain, he suddenly darted up the ladder, threw down the trap-door, and, lo! like a hermit-crab, he had taken possession. Wisely they left him alone.

For a full fortnight he allowed neither to enter the little chamber. As often as they called him, he answered cheerfully, but never showed himself except when Phemy brought him food, which, at his urgent request, was only once in the twenty-four hours—after night-fall, the last thing before she went to bed; then he would slide down the ladder, take what she had brought him, and hurry up again. Phemy was perplexed, and at last a good deal distressed, for he had always been glad of her company before.

At length, one day, hearing her voice in the shop, and having peeped through a hole in the floor to see that no stranger was present, he invited her to go up, and lifted the trap-door.

"Come, come," he said hurriedly, when her head appeared and came no farther.

He stood holding the trap-door, eager to close it again as soon as she should step clear of it, and surprise was retarding her ascent.

Before hearing his mind, the carpenter had already made for him, by way of bedstead, a simple frame of wood, crossed with laths in the form of lattice-work: this the laird had taken and set up on its side, opposite the window, about two feet from it, so that, with abundant passage for air, it served as a screen. Fixing it firmly to the floor, he had placed on the top of it a large pot of the favourite cottage-plant there called *Humility*, and trained its long pendent runners over it. On the floor between it and the window, he had ranged a row of flower-pots—one of them with an ivy-plant, which also he had begun to train against the trellis; and already the humility and the ivy had begun to intermingle.

At one side of the room, where the sloping roof met the floor, was his bed of fresh pine-shavings,

amongst which, their resinous half-aromatic odour apparently not sweet enough to content him, he had scattered a quantity of dried rose-leaves. A thick tartan plaid, for sole covering, lay upon the heap.

"I wad hae likit hey better," he said, pointing to this lair rather than couch, "but it 's some ill to get, an' the spales they 're at han', an' they smell unco clean."

At the opposite side of the room lay a correspondent heap, differing not a little, however, in appearance and suggestion. As far as visible form and material could make it one, it was a grave—rather a short one, but abundantly long for the laird. It was in reality a heap of mould, about a foot and a half high, covered with the most delicate grass, and bespangled with daisies.

"Laird!" said Phemy, half reproachfully, as she stood gazing at the marvel, "ye hae been oot at nicht!"

"Aye—a' nicht whiles, whan naebody was aboot 'cep' the win'"—he pronounced the word with a long-drawn imitative sough—"an' the cloods an' the splash o' the watter."

Pining under the closer imprisonment in his garret,

which the discovery of his subterranean refuge had brought upon him, the laird would often have made his escape at night but for the fear of disturbing the Mairs; and now that there was no one to disturb, the temptation to spend his nights in the open air was the more irresistible that he had conceived the notion of enticing nature herself into his very chamber. Abroad then he had gone, as soon as the first midnight closed around his new dwelling, and in the fields had with careful discrimination begun to collect the mould for his mound, a handful here and a handful there. This took him several nights, and when it was finished, he was yet more choice in his selection of turf, taking it from the natural grass growing along the roads and on the earthen dykes, or walls, the outer sides of which feed the portionless cows of that country. Searching for miles in the moonlight, he had, with eye and hand, chosen out patches of this grass, the shortest and thickest he could find, and with a pocket knife, often in pieces of only a few inches, removed the best of it and carried it home, to be fitted on the heap, and with every ministration and blandishment enticed to flourish. He pressed it down with soft firm hands, and beshowered it with water first

warmed a little in his mouth; when the air was soft, he guided the wind to blow upon it; and as the sun could not reach it where it lay, he gathered a marvellous heap of all the bright sherds he could find—of crockery and glass and mirror, so arranging them in the window, that each threw its tiny reflex upon the turf. With this last contrivance, Phemy was specially delighted; and the laird, happy as a child in beholding her delight, threw himself in an ecstasy on the mound and clasped it in his arms. I can hardly doubt that he regarded it as representing his own grave, to which in his happier moods he certainly looked forward as a place of final and impregnable refuge.

As he lay thus, foreshadowing his burial, or rather his resurrection, a young canary which had flown from one of the cottages, flitted in with a golden shiver and flash, and alighted on his head. He took it gently in his hand and committed it to Phemy to carry home, with many injunctions against disclosing how it had been captured.

His lonely days were spent in sleep, in tending his plants, or in contriving defences; but in all weathers he wandered out at midnight, and roamed or rested among fields or rocks till the first signs

of the breaking day, when he hurried like a wild creature to his den.

Before long he had contrived an ingenious trap, or man-spider-web, for the catching of any human insect that might seek entrance at his window: the moment the invading body should reach a certain point, a number of lines would drop about him, in making his way through which he would straightway be caught by the barbs of countless fish-hooks—the whole strong enough at least to detain him until its inventor should have opened the trap-door and fled.

CHAPTER VIII.

CREAM OR SCUM?

OF the new evil report abroad concerning him, nothing had as yet reached Malcolm. He read, and pondered, and wrestled with difficulties of every kind; saw only a little of Lady Florimel, who, he thought, avoided him; saw less of the marquis; and, as the evenings grew longer, spent still larger portions of them with Duncan—now and then reading to him, but oftener listening to his music or taking a lesson in the piper's art. He went seldom into the Seaton, for the faces there were changed towards him. Attributing this to the reports concerning his parentage, and not seeing why he should receive such treatment because of them, hateful though they might well be to himself, he began to feel some bitterness towards his early world, and would now and then repeat to himself a misanthropical thing he had read, fancying he too had come to that conclusion. But there was not much danger of such a mood growing habitual with one who knew Duncan MacPhail, Blue Peter, and

the schoolmaster—not to mention Miss Horn. To know one person who is positively to be trusted, will do more for a man's moral nature—yes, for his spiritual nature—than all the sermons he has ever heard or ever can hear.

One evening, Malcolm thought he would pay Joseph a visit, but when he reached Scaurnose, he found it nearly deserted: he had forgotten that this was one of the nights of meeting in the Baillies' Barn. Phemy indeed had not gone with her father and mother, but she was spending the evening with the laird. Lifting the latch, and seeing no one in the house, he was on the point of withdrawing when he caught sight of an eye peeping through an inch-opening of the door of the bed-closet, which the same moment was hurriedly closed. He called, but received no reply, and left the cottage wondering. He had not heard that Mrs. Mair had given Lizzy Findlay shelter for a season. And now a neighbour had observed and put her own construction on the visit, her report of which strengthened the general conviction of his unworthiness.

Descending from the promontory, and wandering slowly along the shore, he met the Scaurnose part of the congregation returning home. The few salu-

tations dropped him as he passed were distant, and bore an expression of disapproval. Mrs. Mair only, who was walking with a friend, gave him a kind nod. Blue Peter, who followed at a little distance, turned and walked back with him.

"I'm exerceesed i' my min'," he said, as soon as they were clear of the stragglers, "aboot the turn things hae taen, doon-by at the Barn."

"They tell me there 's some gey queer customers taen to haudin' furth," returned Malcolm.

"It 's a fac'," answered Peter. The fowk 'll hardly hear a word noo frae ony o' the aulder an' soberer Christi-ans. They haena the gift o' the Speerit, they say. But in place o' steerin' them up to tak hold upo' their Maker, thir new lichts set them up to luik doon upo' ither fowk, propheseein' an' denuncin', as gien the Lord had committit jeedgment into their han's."

"What is 't they tak haud o' to misca' them for?" asked Malcolm.

"It's no sae muckle," answered Peter, "for onything they du, as for what they believe or dinna believe. There's an 'uman frae Clamrock was o' their pairty the nicht. She stude up an' spak weel, an' weel oot, but no to muckle profit, as 't seemed to me;

only I 'm maybe no a fair jeedge, for I cudna be rid o' the notion 'at she was lattin' at mysel' a' the time. I dinna ken what for. An' I cudna help wonnerin' gien she kent what fowk used to say aboot hersel' whan she was a lass; for gien the sma' half o' that was true, a body micht think the new grace gien her wad hae driven her to hide her head, i' place o' exaltin' her horn on high. But maybe it was a' lees—she kens best hersel'."

"There canna be muckle worship gaein' on wi' ye by this time, than, I'm thinkin'," said Malcolm.

"I dinna like to say 't," returned Joseph; "but there's a speerit o' speeritooal pride abroad amang 's, it seems to me, 'at 's no fawvourable to devotion. They hae taen 't intill their heids, for ae thing—an that's what Dilse's Bess lays on at—'at 'cause they're fisher-fowk, they hae a speecial mission to convert the warl'."

"What foon' they that upo'?" asked Malcolm.

"Ow, what the Saviour said to Peter an' the lave o' them 'at was fishers—to come wi' him, an' he wad mak them fishers o' men."

"Ay, I see!—What for dinna ye bide at hame, you an' the lave o' the douce anes?"

"There ye come upo' the thing 'at 's troublin' me.

—Are we 'at begude it to brak it up?—Or are we to stan' aside an' lat it a' gang to dirt an' green bree?—Or are we to bide wi' them, an warsle aboot holy words till we tyne a' stamach for holy things?"

"Cud ye brak it up gien ye tried?" asked Malcolm.

"I doobt no. That's ane o' the considerations 'at hings some sair upo' me: see what we hae dune!"

"What for dinna ye gang ower to Maister Graham, an' speir what he thinks?"

"What for sud I gang till him? What 's *he* but a fine moaral man? I never h'ard 'at he had ony discernment o' the min' o' the speerit."

"That's what Dilse's Bess frae Clamrock wad say aboot yersel', Peter."

"An' I doobt she wadna be far wrang."

"Ony gait, she kens nae mair aboot you nor ye ken aboot the maister. Ca' ye a man wha cares for naething in h'aven or in earth but the wull o' 's Creator—ca' ye sic a man no speeritual? Jist gang ye till 'im, an' maybe he'll lat in a glent upo' ye 'at 'll astonish ye."

"He's taen unco little enterest in onything 'at was gaein' on."

"Arena ye some wissin' ye hadna taen muckle mair yersel, Peter?"

"'Deed am I! But gien he be giftit like that ye say, what for didna he try to haud 's richt?"

"Maybe he thoucht ye wad mak yer mistaks better wantin' him."

"Weel, ye dinna ca' that freenly!"

"What for no? I hae h'ard him say fowk canna come richt 'cep' by haein' room to gang wrang. But jist ye gang till him noo. Maybe he'll open mair een i' yer heids nor ye kent ye had."

"Weel, maybe we micht du waur. I s' mention the thing to Bow-o'-meal an' Jeames Gentle, an' see what *they* say.—There's nae guid to be gotten o' gaein' to the minister, ye see: there's naething in him, as the saw says, but what the spune pits intill him."

With this somewhat unfavourable remark, Blue Peter turned homewards. Malcolm went slowly back to his room, his tallow candle, and his volume of Gibbon.

He read far into the night, and his candle was burning low in the socket. Suddenly he sat straight up in his chair, listening: he thought he heard a sound in the next room—it was impossible even to imagine of what—it was such a mere abstraction of sound. He listened with every nerve, but heard

nothing more; crept to the door of the wizard's chamber, and listened again; listened until he could no longer tell whether he heard or not, and felt like a deaf man imagining sounds; then crept back to his own room and went to bed—all but satisfied that, if it was anything, it must have been some shaking window or door he had heard.

But he could not get rid of the notion that he had smelt sulphur.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S COTTAGE.

THE following night, three of the Scaurnose fishermen—Blue Peter, Bow-o'-meal, and Jeames Gentle —called at the schoolmaster's cottage in the Alton, and were soon deep in earnest conversation with him around his peat-fire, in the room which served him for study, dining-room, and bed-chamber. All the summer a honey-suckle outside watched his back window for him; now it was guarded within by a few flowerless plants. It was a deep little window in a thick wall, with an air of mystery, as if thence the privileged might look into some region of strange and precious things. The front window was comparatively commonplace, with a white muslin curtain across the lower half. In the middle of the sanded floor stood a table of white deal, much stained with ink. The green-painted doors of the *box-bed* opposite the hearth, stood open, revealing a spotless white counterpane. On the wall beside the front window, hung by red cords three shelves of books; and near the back window stood a dark

old-fashioned bureau, with pendent brass handles as bright as new, supporting a bookcase with glass doors, crowded with well-worn bindings. A few deal chairs completed the furniture.

"It's a sair vex, sir, to think o' what we a' jeedged to be the wark o' the speerit takin' sic a turn! I'm feart it 'll lie heavy at oor door," said Blue Peter, after a sketch of the state of affairs.

"I don't think they can have sunk so low as the early Corinthian Church yet," said Mr. Graham, "and St. Paul never seems to have blamed himself for preaching the gospel to the Corinthians."

"Weel, maybe!" rejoined Mair. "But, meantime, the practical p'int is—Are we to tyauve (*struggle*) to set things richt again, or are we to lea' them to their ain devices?"

"What power have you to set things right?"

"Nane, sir. The Baillies' Barn 's as free to them as to oorsel's."

"What influence have you, then?"

"Unco little," said Bow-o'-meal, taking the word. "They're afore the win'. An' it 's plain eneuch 'at to stan' up an' oppose them wad be but to breed strife an' debate."

"An' that micht put mony a waukent conscience

soon' asleep again—maybe no to be waukent ony mair," said Blue Peter.

"Then you don't think you can either communicate or receive benefit by continuing to take a part in those meetings?"

"I dinna think it," answered all three.

"Then the natural question is—'Why should you go?'"

"We're feart for the guilt o' what the minister ca's shism," said Blue Peter.

"That might have occurred to you before you forsook the parish-church," said the schoolmaster, with a smile.

"But there was nae speeritooal noorishment to be gotten i' that houff (*haunt*)," said Jeames Gentle.

"How did you come to know the want of it?"

"Ow, that cam frae the speerit himsel'—what else?" replied Gentle.

"By what means?"

"By the readin' o' the word an' by prayer," answered Gentle.

"By his ain v'ice i' the hert," said Bow-o'-meal.

"Then a public assembly is not necessary for the communication of the gifts of the spirit?"

They were silent.

"Isn't it possible that the eagerness after such assemblies may have something to do with a want of confidence in what the Lord says of his kingdom —that it spreads like the hidden leaven—grows like the buried seed? My own conviction is, that if a man would but bend his energies to *live*, if he would but try to be a true, that is, a godlike man, in all his dealings with his fellows, a genuine neighbour and not a selfish unit, he would open such channels for the flow of the spirit as no amount of even honest and so-called successful preaching could."

"Wha but ane was ever fit to lead sic a life 's that?"

"All might be trying after it. In proportion as our candle burns it will give light. No talking about light will supply the lack of its presence either to the talker or the listeners."

"There 's a heap made o' the preachin' o' the word i' the buik itsel'," said Peter with emphasis.

"Undoubtedly. But just look at our Lord: he never stopped living amongst his people—hasn't stopped yet; but he often refused to preach, and personally has given it up altogether now."

"Ay, but ye see he kent what he was duin'."

"And so will every man in proportion as he partakes of his spirit."

"But dinna ye believe there *is* sic a thing as gettin' a call to the preachin'?"

"I do; but even then a man's work is of worth only as it supplements his life. A network of spiritual fibres connects the two, makes one of them."

"But surely, sir, them 'at 's o' the same min' oucht to meet an' stir ane anither up? 'They that feart the Lord spak aften thegither,' ye ken."

"What should prevent them? Why should not such as delight in each other's society, meet, and talk, and pray together,—address each the others if they like? There is plenty of opportunity for that, without forsaking the church or calling public meetings. To continue your quotation — 'The Lord hearkened and heard:' observe, the Lord is not here said to hearken to sermons or prayers, but to the *talk* of his people. This would have saved you from false relations with men that oppose themselves, caring nothing for the truth—perhaps eager to save their souls, nothing more at the very best."

"Sir! sir! what wad ye hae? Daur ye say it 's no a body's first duty to save his ain sowl alive?" exclaimed Bow-o'-meal.

"I daur 't—but there 's little daur intill 't!" said Mr. Graham, breaking into Scotch.

Bow-o'-meal rose from his chair in indignation, Blue Peter made a grasp at his bonnet, and Jeames Gentle gave a loud sigh of commiseration.

"I allow it to be a very essential piece of prudence," added the schoolmaster, resuming his quieter English—but the first duty!—no. The Catechism might have taught you better than that! To mind his chief end must surely be man's first duty; and the Catechism says—'Man's chief end is to glorify God.'"

"And to enjoy him for ever," supplemented Peter.

"That's a safe consequence. There's no fear of the second if he does the first. Any how he cannot enjoy him for ever this moment, and he can glorify him at once."

"Ay, but hoo?" said Bow-o'-meal, ready to swoop upon the master's reply.

"Just as Jesus Christ did—by doing his will—by obedience."

"That's no faith—it's works! Ye'll never save yer sowl that gait, sir."

"No man can ever save his soul. God only can do that. You can glorify him by giving yourself up heart and soul and body and life to his Son. Then you shall *be* saved. That you must leave to

him, and *do what he tells you.* There will be no fear of the saving then—though it 's not an easy matter—even for *him*, as has been sorely proved."

"An' hoo are we to gie oorsel's up till him? —for ye see we're practical kin' o' fowk, huz fisher-fowk, Maister Graham," said Bow-o'-meal.

The tone implied that the schoolmaster was not practical.

"I say again—In doing *his* will and not your own."

"An' what may his wull be?"

"Is he not telling you himself at this moment? Do you not know what his will is? How should *I* come between him and you! For anything I know, it may be that you pay your next door neighbour a crown you owe him, or make an apology to the one on the other side. *I* do not know: you do."

"Dinna ye think aboot savin' yer ain sowl noo, Maister Graham?" said Bow-o'-meal, returning on their track.

"No, I don't. I've forgotten all about that. I only desire and pray to do the will of my God—which is all in all to me."

"What say ye than aboot the sowls o' ither fowk? Wadna ye save them, no?"

"Gladly would I save them—but according to the will of God. If I were, even unwittingly, to attempt it in any other way, I should be casting stumbling-blocks in their path, and separating myself from my God—doing that which is not of faith, and therefore is sin. It is only where a man is at one with God that he can do the right thing or take the right way. Whatever springs from any other source than the spirit that dwelt in Jesus, is of sin, and works to thwart the divine will. Who knows what harm may be done to a man by hurrying a spiritual process in him?"

"I doobt, sir, gien your doctrine was to get a hearin', there wad be unco little dune for the glory o' God i' this place!" remarked Bow-o'-meal, with sententious reproof.

"But what was done would be of the right sort, and surpassingly powerful."

"Weel, to come back to the business in han'—what wad be yer advice?" said Bow-o'-meal.

"That 's a thing none but a lawyer should give. I have shown you what seem to me the principles involved: I can do no more."

"Ye dinna ca' that neebourly, whan a body comes speirin' 't!"

"Are you prepared then to take my advice?"

"Ye wadna hae a body du that aforehan'! We micht as weel a' be Papists, an' believe as we 're tauld."

"Precisely so. But you can exercise your judgment upon the principles whereon my opinion is founded, with far more benefit than upon my opinion itself—which I cannot well wish you to adopt, seeing I think it far better for a man to go wrong upon his own honest judgment, than to go right upon anybody else's judgment, however honest also."

"Ye hae a heap o' queer doctrines, sir."

"And yet you ask advice of me?"

"We haena ta'en muckle, ony gait," returned Bow-o'-meal rudely, and walked from the cottage.

Jeames Gentle and Blue Peter bade the master a kindly good-night, and followed Bow-o'-meal.

The next Sunday evening Blue Peter was again at the Alton, accompanied by Gentle and another fisherman, not Bow-o'-meal, and had another and longer conversation with the schoolmaster. The following Sunday he went yet again; and from that time, every Sunday evening, as soon as he had had his tea, Blue Peter took down his broad bonnet, and set out to visit Mr. Graham. As he went, one and

another would join him as he passed, the number increasing every time, until at last ten or twelve went regularly.

But Mr. Graham did not like such a forsaking of wives and children on the Sunday.

"Why shouldn't you bring Mrs. Mair with you?" he said one evening, addressing Joseph first. Then turning to the rest—"I should be happy to see any of your wives who can come," he added; "and some of you have children who would be no trouble. If there is any good in gathering this way, why shouldn't we have those with us who are our best help at all other times?"

"'Deed, sir," said Joseph, "we 're sae used to oor wives 'at we 're ower ready to forget hoo ill we cud du wantin' them."

Mrs. Mair and two other wives came the next night. A few hung back from modesty and dread of being catechized; but ere long about half a dozen went when they could.

I need hardly say that Malcolm, as soon as he learned what was going on, made one of the company. And truly, although he did not know even yet all the evil that threatened him, he stood in heavy need of the support and comfort to be derived

from such truths as Mr. Graham unfolded. Duncan also, although he took little interest in what passed, went sometimes, and was welcomed.

The talk of the master not unfrequently lapsed into monologue, and sometimes grew eloquent. Seized occasionally by the might of the thoughts which arose in him,—thoughts which would, to him, have lost all their splendour as well as worth, had he imagined them the offspring of his own faculty, meteors of his own atmosphere instead of phenomena of the heavenly region manifesting themselves on the hollow side of the celestial sphere of human vision,—he would break forth in grand poetic speech that roused to aspiration Malcolm's whole being, while in the same instant calming him with the summer peace of profoundest faith.

To no small proportion of his hearers some of such outbursts were altogether unintelligible—a matter of no moment; but there were of them who understood enough to misunderstand utterly: interpreting his riches by their poverty, they misinterpreted them pitifully, and misrepresented them worse. And, alas! in the little company there were three or four men who, for all their upward impulses, yet remained capable of treachery, because

incapable of recognizing the temptation to it for what it was. These by and by began to confer together and form an opposition—in this at least ungenerous, that they continued to assemble at his house, and show little sign of dissension. When, however, they began at length to discover that the master did not teach that interpretation of atonement which they had derived—they little knew whence, but delivered another as the doctrine of St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John, they judged themselves bound to take measures towards the quenching of a dangerous heresy. For the more ignorant a man is, the more capable is he of being absolutely certain of many things—with such certainty, that is, as consists in the absence of doubt. Mr. Graham, in the meantime, full of love, and quiet solemn fervour, placed completest confidence in their honesty, and spoke his mind freely and faithfully.

CHAPTER X.

ONE DAY.

THE winter was close at hand—indeed, in that northern region, might already have claimed entire possession; but the trailing golden fringe of the skirts of autumn was yet visible behind him, as he wandered away down the slope of the world. In the gentle sadness of the season, Malcolm could not help looking back with envy to the time when labour, adventure, and danger, stormy winds and troubled waters, would have helped him to bear the weight of the moral atmosphere which now from morning to night oppressed him. Since their last conversation, Lady Florimel's behaviour to him was altered. She hardly ever sent for him now, and when she did, gave her orders so distantly that at length, but for his grandfather's sake, he could hardly have brought himself to remain in the house even until the return of his master who was from home, and contemplated proposing to him as soon as he came back, that he should leave his service and resume his former occupation, at least until the

return of summer should render it fit to launch the cutter again.

One day, a little after noon, Malcolm stepped from the house. The morning had broken gray and squally, with frequent sharp showers, and had grown into a gurly gusty day. Now and then the sun sent a dim yellow glint through the troubled atmosphere, but it was straightway swallowed up in the volumes of vapour seething and tumbling in the upper regions. As he crossed the threshold, there came a moaning wind from the west, and the water-laden branches of the trees all went bending before it, shaking their burden of heavy drops on the ground. It was dreary, dreary, outside and in. He turned and looked at the house. If he might have but one peep of the goddess far withdrawn! What did he want of her? Nothing but her favour—something acknowledged between them—some understanding of accepted worship! Alas! it was all weakness, and the end thereof dismay! It was but the longing of the opium-eater or the drinker for the poison which in delight lays the foundations of torture. No; he knew where to find food—something that was neither opium nor strong drink—something that in torture sustained, and, when its fruition came,

would, even in the splendours of delight, far surpass their short-lived boon! He turned towards the schoolmaster's cottage.

Under the trees, which sighed aloud in the wind, and, like earth-clouds, rained upon him as he passed, across the churchyard, bare to the gray, hopeless-looking sky, through the iron gate he went, and opened the master's outer door. Ere he reached that of his room, he heard his voice inviting him to enter.

"Come to condole with me, Malcolm?" said Mr. Graham cheerily.

"What for, sir?" asked Malcolm.

"You haven't heard, then, that I 'm going to be sent about my business? At least, it 's more than likely."

Malcolm dropped into a seat, and stared like an idol. Could he have heard the words? In his eyes Mr. Graham was the man of the place—the real person of the parish. He dismissed! The words breathed of mingled impiety and absurdity.

The schoolmaster burst out laughing at him.

"I 'm feart to speyk, sir!" said Malcolm. "Whatever I say, I 'm bun' to mak a fule o' mysel'! What in plain words div ye mean, sir?"

"Somebody has been accusing me of teaching heresy—in the school to my scholars, and in my own house to the fisherfolk; the presbytery has taken it up, and here is my summons to appear before them and answer to the charge."

"Guid preserve 's sir! An' is this the first ye hae h'ard o' 't?"

"The very first."

"An' what are ye gauin' to du?"

"Appear, of course."

"An' what 'll ye say to them?"

"I shall answer their questions."

"They 'll condemn ye!"

"I do not doubt it."

"An' what neist?"

"I shall have to leave Scotland, I suppose."

"Sir, it 's awfu'!"

The horror-stricken expression of Malcolm's face drew a second merry laugh from Mr. Graham.

"They can't burn me," he said: "you needn't look like that."

"But there 's something terrible wrang, sir, whan sic men hae pooer ower sic a man."

"They have no power but what 's given them. I shall accept their decision as the decree of heaven."

"It 's weel to be you, sir—'at can tak a thing sae quaiet."

"You mustn't suppose I am naturally so philosophical. It stands for five and forty years of the teaching of the Son of Man in this wonderful school of his, where the clever would be destroyed but for the stupid, where the church would tear itself to pieces but for the laws of the world, and where the wicked themselves are the greatest furtherance of godliness in the good."

"But wha ever cud hae been baze eneuch to du 't!" said Malcolm, too much astounded for his usual eager attention to the words that fell from the master.

"That I would rather not inquire," answered Mr. Graham. "In the meantime it would be better if the friends would meet somewhere else, for this house is mine only in virtue of my office. Will you tell them so for me?"

"Surely, sir. But will ye no mak ane?"

"Not till this is settled. I will after, so long as I may be here."

"Gien onybody had been catecheesin' the bairns, I wad surely hae h'ard o' 't!" said Malcolm, after a pause of rumination. "Poochy wad hae tellt me.

I saw him thestreen (*yester-even*).—Wha 'ill ever say again a thing 's no poassible!"

"Whatever doctrine I may have omitted to press in the school," said Mr. Graham, "I have inculcated nothing at variance with the Confession of Faith or the Shorter Catechism."

"Hoo can ye say that, sir?" returned Malcolm, "whan, in as weel 's oot o' the schuil, ye hae aye insistit 'at God 's a just God—abune a' thing likin' to gie fair play?"

"Well, does the Catechism say anything to the contrary?"

"No in sae mony words, doobtless; but it says a sicht o' things 'at wad mak God oot the maist oonrichteous tyrant 'at ever was."

"I 'm not sure you can show that logically," said Mr. Graham. "I will think it over, however—not that I mean to take up any defence of myself. But now I have letters to write, and must ask you to leave me. Come and see me again to-morrow."

Malcolm went from him—

> like one that hath been stunned,
> And is of sense forlorn.

Here was trouble upon trouble! But what had befallen him compared with what had come upon

the schoolmaster! A man like him to be so treated! How gladly he would work for him all the rest of his days! and how welcome his grandfather would make him to his cottage! Lord Lossie would be the last to object. But he knew it was a baseless castle while he built it, for Mr. Graham would assuredly provide for himself, if it were by breaking stones on the road and saying the Lord's Prayer. It all fell to pieces just as he lifted his hand to Miss Horn's knocker.

She received him with a cordiality such as even she had never shown him before. He told her what threatened Mr. Graham. She heard him to the end without remark, beyond the interjection of an occasional "Eh, sirs!" then sat for a minute in troubled silence.

"There's a heap o' things an 'uman like me," she said at length, "canna un'erstan'. I dinna ken whether some fowk mair nor preten' to un'erstan' them. But set Sandy Graham doon upo' ae side, an' the presbytery doon upo' the ither, an' I hae wit eneuch to ken whilk I wad tak my eternal chance wi'. Some o' the presbytery 's guid eneuch men, but haena ower muckle gumption; an' some o' them has plenty o' gumption, but haena ower muckle grace, to jeedge by the w'y 'at they glower 'an rair, layin' doon the

law as gien the Almichty had been driven to tak coonsel wi' them. But luik at Sandy Graham! *Ye* ken whether he has gumption or no; an' gien he be a stickit minister, he stack by the grace o' moadesty. But, haith, I winna peety him! for, o' a' things, to peety a guid man i' the richt gait is a fule's folly. Troth, I'm a hantle mair concernt aboot yersel', Ma'colm!"

Malcolm heard her without apprehension. His cup seemed full, and he never thought that cups sometimes run over. But perhaps he was so far the nearer to a truth: while the cup of blessing may and often does run over, I doubt if the cup of suffering is ever more than filled to the brim.

"Onything fresh, mem?" he asked, with the image of Mrs. Stewart standing ghastly on the slopes of his imagination.

"I wadna be fit to tell ye, laddie, gien 't warna, as ye ken, 'at the Almichty 's been unco mercifu' to me i' the maitter o' feelin's. Yer freen's i' the Seaton, an' ower at Scaurnose, *hae* feelin's, an' that 's hoo nane o' them a' has pluckit up hert to tell ye o' the waggin' o' slanderous tongues against ye."

"What are they sayin' noo?" asked Malcolm with considerable indifference.

"Naither mair nor less than that ye're the father o' an oonborn wean," answered Miss Horn.

"I dinna freely unnerstan' ye," returned Malcolm, for the unexpectedness of the disclosure was scarcely to be mastered at once.

I shall not put on record the plain form of honest speech whereby she made him at once comprehend the nature of the calumny. He started to his feet, and shouted "Wha daur say that?" so loud that the listening Jean almost fell down the stair.

"Wha *sud* say 't but the lassie hersel'?" answered Miss Horn simply. "*She* maun hae the best richt to say wha 's wha."

"It wad better become *ony*body but her," said Malcolm.

"What mean ye there, laddie?" cried Miss Horn, alarmed.

"'At nane cud ken sae weel 's hersel' it was a damned lee. Wha is she?"

"Wha but Meg Partan's Lizzy!"

"Poor lassie! is that it?—Eh, but I 'm sorry for her! *She* never said it was me. An' whaever said it, surely ye dinna believe 't o' me, mem?"

"*Me* believe 't! Ma'colm MacPhail, wull ye daur insult a maiden wuman 'at 's stude clear o' reproch

till she 's lang past the danger o' 't? It 's been wi' unco sma' diffeeclety, I maun alloo, for I haena' been led into ony temptation!"

"Eh, mem!" returned Malcolm, perceiving by the flash of her eyes and the sudden halt of her speech that she was really indignant—"I dinna ken what I hae said to anger ye!"

"Anger me! quo' he? What though I hae nae feelin's! Will he daur till imaigine 'at he wad be sittin' there, an' me haudin' him company, gien I believed him cawpable o' turnin' oot sic a meeserable, contemptible wratch! The Lord come atween me an' my wrath!"

"I beg yer pardon, mem. A body canna aye put things thegither afore he speyks. I 'm richt sair obleeged till ye for takin' my pairt."

"I tak nobody's pairt but my ain, laddie. Obleeged to me for haein' a wheen coammon sense—a thing 'at I was born wi'! Toots! Dinna haiver."

"Weel, mem, what wad ye hae me du? I canna sen' my auld daddie roon the toon wi' his pipes, to procleem 'at I 'm no the man. I 'm thinkin' I 'll hae to lea' the place."

"Wad ye sen' yer daddy roun' wi' the pipes to say 'at ye *was* the man? Ye micht as weel du the tane

as the tither. Mony a better man has been waur misca'd, an' gart fowk forget 'at ever the lee was lee'd. Na, na; never rin frae a lee. An' never say, naither, 'at ye didna du the thing, 'cep' it be laid straucht to yer face. Lat a lee lie i' the dirt. Gien ye pike it up, the dirt 'll stick till ye, though ye fling the lee ower the dyke at the warl's en'. Na, na! Lat a lee lie, as ye wad the deevil's tail 'at the laird's Jock took aff wi the edge o' 's spaud."

"A' thing 's agane me the noo!" sighed Malcolm.

"Auld Jobb ower again!" returned Miss Horn almost sarcastically. "The deil had the warst o' 't though, an' wull hae, i' the lang hinner en'. Meantime ye maun face him. There's nae airmour for the back aither i' the Bible or the Pilgrim's Progress."

"What wad ye hae me du, than, mem?"

"Du? Wha said ye was to du onything? The best duin whiles is to bide still. Lat ye the jaw (*wave*) gae ower ohn joukit (*without ducking*)."

"Gien I binna to du onything, I maist wiss I hadna kent," said Malcolm, whose honourable nature writhed under the imputed vileness.

"It 's aye better to ken in what licht ye stan' wi' ither fowk. It hauds ye ohn lippent ower muckle, an' sae dune things or made remarks 'at wad be

misread till ye. Ye maun haud an open ro'd, 'at the trowth whan it comes oot may hae free coorse. The ae thing 'at spites me is, 'at the verra fowk 'at was the first to spread yer ill report, 'ill be the first to wuss ye weel whan the trowth 's kent—ay, an' they 'll persuaud their verra sel's 'at they stack up for ye like born brithers."

"There *maun* be some jeedgement upo' leein'!"

"The warst wuss I hae agane ony sic back-biter is that he may live to be affrontit at himsel'. Efter that he 'll be guid eneuch company for me. Gang yer wa's, laddie; say yer prayers, an' haud up yer heid. Wha wadna raither be accused o' a' the sins i' the comman'ments nor be guilty o' ane o' them?"

Malcolm did hold up his head as he walked away.

Not a single person was in the street. Far below, the sea was chafing and tossing—grey green broken into white. The horizon was formless with mist, hanging like thin wool from the heavens down to the face of the waters, against which the wind, which had shifted round considerably towards the north, and blew in quicker-coming and more menacing gusts, appeared powerless. He would have gone to the sands and paced the shore till nightfall, but that he would not expose himself thus to unfriendly eyes and

false judgments. He turned to the right instead, and walked along the top of the cliffs eastward. Buffeted by winds without and hurrying fancies within, he wandered on until he came near Colonsay Castle, at sight of which the desire awoke in him to look again on the scene of Lady Florimel's terror. He crossed the head of the little bay and descended into the heart of the rock. Even there the wind blew dank and howling through all the cavernous hollows. As he approached the last chamber, out of the Devil's Window flew, with clanging wing, an arrow-barbed sea-gull, down to the grey-veiled tumult below, and the joy of life for a moment seized his soul. But the next, the dismay of that which is forsaken was upon him. It was not that the once lordly structure lay abandoned to the birds and the gusts, but that *she* would never think of the place without an instant assay at forgetfulness. He turned and re-ascended, feeling like a ghost that had been wandering through the forlorn chambers of an empty skull.

When he rose on the bare top of the ruin, a heavy shower from the sea was beating slant against the worn walls and gaping clefts. Myriads of such rains had, with age-long inevitableness, crumbled away the strong fortress till its threatful mass had sunk to an

abject heap. Thus all-devouring Death—nay, nay! it is all-sheltering, all-restoring mother Nature, receiving again into her mighty matrix the stuff worn out in the fashioning toil of her wasteful, greedy, and slatternly children. In her genial bosom, the exhausted gathers life, the effete becomes generant, the disintegrate returns to resting and capable form. The rolling oscillating globe dips it for an æon in growing sea, lifts it from the sinking waters of its thousand-year bath to the furnace of the sun, remodels and remoulds, turns ashes into flowers, and divides mephitis into diamonds and breath. The races of men shift and hover like shadows over her surface, while, as a woman dries her garment before the household flame, she turns it, by portions, now to and now from the sun-heart of fire. Oh joy that all the hideous lacerations and vile gatherings of refuse which the worshippers of mammon disfigure the earth withal, scoring the tale of their coming dismay on the visage of their mother, shall one day lie fathoms deep under the blessed ocean, to be cleansed and remade into holy because lovely forms! May the ghosts of the men who mar the earth, turning her sweet rivers into channels of filth, and her living air into irrespirable vapours and pestilences, haunt the desolations they

have made, until they loathe the work of their hands, and turn from themselves with a divine repudiation.

It was about half tide, and the sea coming up, with the wind straight from the north, when Malcolm, having descended to the shore of the little bay, and scrambled out upon the rocks, bethought him of a certain cave which he had not visited since he was a child, and climbing over the high rocks between, took shelter there from the wind. He had forgotten how beautiful it was, and stood amazed at the richness of its colour, imagining he had come upon a cave of the serpentine marble which is found on the coast; for sides and roof and rugged floor were gorgeous with bands and spots and veins of green, and rusty red. A nearer inspection, however, showed that these hues were not of the rock itself, but belonged to the garden of the ocean, and when he turned to face the sea, lo! they had all but vanished, the cave shone silvery gray, with a faint moony sparkle, and out came the lovely carving of the rodent waves. All about, its sides were fretted in exquisite curves, and fantastic yet ever-graceful knots and twists; as if a mass of gnarled and contorted roots, first washed of every roughness by some ethereal solvent, leaving only the soft lines of yet grotesque volutions, had been transformed into

mingled silver and stone. Like a soldier crab that had found a shell to his mind, he gazed through the yawning mouth of the cavern at the turmoil of the rising tide, as it rushed straight towards him through a low jagged channel in the rocks. But straight with the tide came the wind, blowing right into the cave; and finding it keener than pleasant, he turned and went farther in. After a steep ascent some little way, the cavern took a sharp turn to one side, where not a breath of wind, not a glimmer of light, reached, and there he sat down upon a stone, and fell a thinking.

He must face the lie out, and he must accept any mother God had given him; but with such a mother as Mrs. Stewart, and without Mr. Graham, how was he to endure the altered looks of his old friends? Faces indifferent before, had grown suddenly dear to him; and opinions he would have thought valueless once, had become golden in his eyes. Had he been such as to deserve their reproaches, he would doubtless have steeled himself to despise them; but his innocence bound him to the very people who judged him guilty. And there was that awful certainty slowly but steadily drawing nearer!—that period of vacant anguish, in which Lady Florimel must vanish from his sight, and the splen-

dour of his life go with her, to return no more!

But not even yet did he *cherish* any fancy of coming nearer to her than the idea of absolute service authorized. As often as the fancy had, compelled by the lady herself, crossed the horizon of his thoughts, a repellent influence from the same source had been at hand to sweep it afar into its antenatal chaos. But his love rose ever from the earth to which the blow had hurled it, purified again, once more all devotion and no desire, careless of recognition beyond the acceptance of its offered service, and content that the be-all should be the end-all.

The cave seemed the friendliest place he had yet found. Earth herself had received him into her dark bosom, where no eye could discover him, and no voice reach him but that of the ocean, as it tossed and wallowed in the palm of God's hand. He heard its roar on the rocks around him; and the air was filled with a loud noise of broken waters, while every now and then the wind rushed with a howl into the cave, as if searching for him in its crannies; the wild raving soothed him, and he felt as if he would gladly sit there, in the dark torn with tumultuous noises, until his fate had unfolded itself.

The noises thickened around him as the tide

rose; but so gradually that, although at length he could not have heard his own voice, he was unaware of the magnitude to which the mighty uproar had enlarged itself. Suddenly, something smote the rock as with the hammer of Thor, and, as suddenly, the air around him grew stiflingly hot. The next moment it was again cold. He started to his feet in wonder, and sought the light. As he turned the angle, the receding back of a huge green foam-spotted wave, still almost touching the roof of the cavern, was sweeping out again into the tumult. It had filled the throat of it, and so compressed the air within by the force of its entrance, as to drive out for the moment a large portion of its latent heat. Looking then at his watch, Malcolm judged it must be about high tide: brooding in the darkness, he had allowed the moments to lapse unheeded, and it was now impossible to leave the cavern until the tide had fallen. He returned into its penetral, and sitting down with the patience of a fisherman, again lost himself in reverie.

The darkness kept him from perceiving how the day went, and the rapidly increasing roar of the wind made the diminishing sound of the tide's retreat less noticeable. He thought afterwards that perhaps he

had fallen asleep; anyhow, when at length he looked out, the waves were gone from the rock, and the darkness was broken only by the distant gleam of their white defeat. The wind was blowing a hurricane, and, even for his practised foot, it was not easy to surmount the high, abrupt spines he must cross to regain the shore. It was so dark that he could see nothing of the castle, though it was but a few yards from him; and he resolved therefore, the path along the top of the cliffs being unsafe, to make his way across the fields, and return by the high road. The consequence was, that, what with fences and ditches, the violence of the wind, and uncertainty about his direction, it was so long before he felt the hard road under his feet, that with good reason he feared the house would be closed for the night ere he reached it.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SAME NIGHT.

WHEN he came within sight of it, however, he perceived, by the hurried movement of lights, that instead of being folded in silence, the house was in unwonted commotion. As he hastened to the south door, the prince of the power of the air himself seemed to resist his entrance, so fiercely did the wind, eddying round the building, dispute every step he made towards it; and when at length he reached and opened it, a blast, rushing up the glen straight from the sea, burst wide the opposite one, and roared through the hall like a torrent. Lady Florimel, flitting across it at the moment, was almost blown down, and shrieked aloud for help. Malcolm was already at the north door, exerting all his strength to close it, when she spied him, and, bounding to him, with white face and dilated eyes, exclaimed—

"Oh Malcolm! what a time you have been!"

"What's wrang, my leddy?" cried Malcolm with respondent terror.

"Don't you hear it?" she answered. "The wind is blowing the house down. There 's just been a terrible fall, and every moment I hear it going. If my father were only come! We shall be all blown into the burn."

"Nae fear o' that, my leddy!" returned Malcolm. "The wa's o' the auld carcass are 'maist live rock, an' 'ill stan' the warst win' 'at ever blew—this side o' the tropics, ony gait. Gien 't war ance to get its nose in, I wadna say but it micht tirr (*strip*) the rufe, but it winna blaw 's intil the burn, my leddy. I 'll jist gang and see what's the mischeef."

He was moving away, but Lady Florimel stopped him.

"No, no, Malcolm!" she said. "It 's very silly of me, I daresay; but I 've been so frightened. They 're such a set of geese—Mrs. Courthope, and the butler, and all of them! Don't leave me, please."

"I *maun* gang and see what 's amiss, my leddy," answered Malcolm; "but ye can come wi' me gien ye like. What 's fa'en, div ye think?"

"Nobody knows. It fell with a noise like thunder, and shook the whole house."

"It 's far ower dark to see onything frae the oot-side," rejoined Malcolm, "—at least afore the mune's

up. It's as dark 's pick. But I can sune saitisfee mysel' whether the de'il 's i' the hoose or no."

He took a candle from the hall-table, and went up the square staircase, followed by Florimel.

"What w'y is 't, my leddy, 'at the hoose is no lockit up, an' ilka body i' their beds?" he asked.

"My father is coming home to-night. Didn't you know? But I should have thought a storm like this enough to account for people not being in bed!"

"It's a fearfu' nicht for him to be sae far frae his! Whaur 's he comin' frae? Ye never speyk to me noo, my leddy, an' naebody tellt me."

"He was to come from Fochabers to-night. Stoat took the bay mare to meet him yesterday."

"He wad never start in sic a win'! It's fit to blaw the saiddle aff o' the mear's back."

"He may have started before it came on to blow like this," said Lady Florimel.

Malcolm liked the suggestion the less because of its probability, believing, in that case, he should have arrived long ago. But he took care not to increase Florimel's alarm.

By this time Malcolm knew the whole of the accessible inside of the roof well—better far than any one else about the house. From one part to another,

over the whole of it, he now led Lady Florimel. In the big-shadowed glimmer of his one candle, all parts of the garret seemed to him frowning with knitted brows over resentful memories—as if the phantom forms of all the past joys and self-renewing sorrows, all the sins and wrongs, all the disappointments and failures of the house, had floated up, generation after generation, into that abode of helpless brooding, and there hung hovering above the fast fleeting life below, which now, in its turn, was ever sending up like fumes from heart and brain, to crowd the dim, dreary, larva-haunted, dream-wallowing chaos of half-obliterated thought and feeling. To Florimel it looked a dread waste, a region deserted and forgotten, mysterious with far-reaching nooks of darkness, and now awful with the wind raving and howling over slates and leads so close to them on all sides,—as if a flying army of demons were tearing at the roof to get in and find covert from pursuit.

At length they approached Malcolm's own quarters, where they would have to pass the very door of the wizard's chamber to reach a short ladder-like stair that led up into the midst of naked rafters, when, coming upon a small storm window near the end of a long passage, Lady Florimel stopped and peeped out.

"The moon is rising," she said, and stood looking.

Malcolm glanced over her shoulder. Eastward a dim light shone up from behind the crest of a low hill. Great part of the sky was clear, but huge masses of broken cloud went sweeping across the heavens. The wind had moderated.

"Aren't we somewhere near your friend the wizard?" said Lady Florimel, with a slight tremble in the tone of mockery with which she spoke.

Malcolm answered as if he were not quite certain.

"Isn't your own room somewhere hereabouts?" asked the girl sharply.

"We 'll jist gang till ae ither queer place," observed Malcolm, pretending not to have heard her, "and gien the rufe be a' richt there, I s' no bather my heid mair aboot it till the mornin'. It 's but a feow steps farther, an' syne a bit stair."

A fit of her not unusual obstinacy had however seized Lady Florimel.

"I won't move a step," she said, "until you have told me where the wizard's chamber is."

"Ahint ye, my leddy, gien ye wull hae 't," answered Malcolm, not unwilling to punish her a little; "—jist at the far en' o' the transe there."

In fact the window in which she stood, lighted the

whole length of the passage from which it opened.

Even as he spoke, there sounded somewhere as it were the slam of a heavy iron door, the echoes of which seemed to go searching into every cranny of the multitudinous garrets. Florimel gave a shriek, and laying hold of Malcolm, clung to him in terror. A sympathetic tremor, set in motion by her cry, went vibrating through the fisherman's powerful frame, and, almost involuntarily, he clasped her close. With wide eyes they stood staring down the long passage, of which, by the poor light they carried, they could not see a quarter of the length. Presently they heard a soft foot-fall along its floor, drawing slowly nearer through the darkness; and slowly out of the darkness grew the figure of a man, huge and dim, clad in a long flowing garment, and coming straight on to where they stood. They clung yet closer together. The apparition came within three yards of them, and then they recognized Lord Lossie in his dressing-gown.

They started asunder. Florimel flew to her father, and Malcolm stood, expecting the last stroke of his evil fortune. The marquis looked pale, stern, and agitated. Instead of kissing his daughter on the forehead as was his custom, he put her from him

with one expanded palm, but the next moment drew her to his side. Then approaching Malcolm, he lighted at his the candle he carried, which a draught had extinguished on the way.

"Go to your room, MacPhail," he said, and turned from him, his arm still round Lady Florimel.

They walked away together down the long passage, vaguely visible in flickering fits. All at once their light vanished, and with it Malcolm's eyes seemed to have left him. But a merry laugh, the silvery thread in which was certainly Florimel's, reached his ears, and brought him to himself.

CHAPTER XII.

SOMETHING FORGOTTEN.

I WILL not trouble my reader with the thoughts that kept rising, flickering, and fading, one after another, for two or three dismal hours, as he lay with eyes closed but sleepless. At length he opened them wide, and looked out into the room. It was a bright moonlit night; the wind had sunk to rest; all the world slept in the exhaustion of the storm; he only was awake: he could lie no longer; he would go out, and discover, if possible, the mischief the tempest had done.

He crept down the little spiral stair used only by the servants, and knowing all the mysteries of lock and bar, was presently in the open air. First he sought a view of the building against the sky, but could not see that any portion was missing. He then proceeded to walk round the house, in order to find what had fallen.

There was a certain neglected spot nearly under his own window, where a wall across an interior angle formed a little court or yard; he had once

peeped in at the door of it, which was always half open, and seemed incapable of being moved in either direction, but had seen nothing except a broken pail and a pile of brushwood: the flat arch over this door was broken, and the door itself half-buried in a heap of blackened stones and mortar. Here was the avalanche whose fall had so terrified the household! The formless mass had yesterday been a fair-proportioned and ornate stack of chimneys.

He scrambled to the top of the heap and sitting down on a stone carved with a plaited Celtic band, yet again fell a-thinking. The marquis must dismiss him in the morning: would it not be better to go away now, and spare poor old Duncan a terrible fit of rage? He would suppose he had fled from the pseudo-maternal net of Mrs. Stewart; and not till he had found a place to which he could welcome him would he tell him the truth. But his nature recoiled both from the unmanliness of such a flight, and from the appearance of conscious wrong it must involve, and he dismissed the notion. Scheme after scheme for the future passed through his head, and still he sat on the heap in the light of the high-gliding moon, like a ghost on the ruins of his earthly home, and

his eyes went listlessly straying like servants without a master. Suddenly he found them occupied with a low iron-studded door in the wall of the house, which he had never seen before. He descended, and found it hardly closed, for there was no notch to receive the heavy latch. Pushing it open on great rusty hinges, he saw within what in the shadow appeared a precipitous descent. His curiosity was roused; he stole back to his room and fetched his candle; and having, by the aid of his tinder-box, lighted it in the shelter of the heap, peeped again through the doorway, and saw what seemed a narrow cylindrical pit, only, far from showing a great yawning depth, it was filled with stones and rubbish nearly to the bottom of the door. The top of the door reached almost to the vaulted roof, one part of which, close to the inner side of the circular wall, was broken. Below this breach, fragments of stone projected from the wall, suggesting the remnants of a stair. With the sight came a foresight of discovery.

One foot on the end of a long stone sticking vertically from the rubbish, and another on one of the stones projecting from the wall, his head was already through the break in the roof; and in a

minute more he was climbing a small, broken, but quite passable spiral staircase, almost a counterpart of that already described as going like a huge auger-bore through the house from top to bottom—that indeed by which he had just descended. There was most likely more of it buried below, probably communicating with an outlet in some part of the rock towards the burn, but the portion of it which, from long neglect, had gradually given way, had fallen down the shaft, and cut off the rest with its ruins.

At the height of a story, he came upon a built-up doorway, and again, at a similar height, upon another; but the parts filled in looked almost as old as the rest of the wall. Not until he reached the top of the stair, did he find a door. It was iron-studded, and heavily hinged, like that below. It opened outward—noiselessly he found, as if its hinges had been recently oiled, and admitted him to a small closet, the second door of which he opened hurriedly, with a beating heart. Yes! there was the check-curtained bed! it must be the wizard's chamber! Crossing to another door, he found it both locked and further secured by a large iron bolt in a strong staple. This latter he drew back, but there was no key in the lock. With scarce a doubt remaining, he

shot down the one stair and flew up the other to try the key that lay in his chest. One moment and he stood in the same room, admitted by the door next his own.

Some exposure was surely not far off! Anyhow here was room for counter-plot, on the chance of baffling something underhand—villainy most likely, where Mrs. Catanach was concerned!—And yet, with the control of it thus apparently given into his hands, he must depart, leaving the house at the mercy of a low woman—for the lock of the wizard's door would not exclude her long if she wished to enter and range the building! He would not go, however, without revealing all to the marquis, and would at once make some provision towards her discomfiture.

Going to the forge, and bringing thence a long bar of iron to use as a lever, he carefully drew from the door-frame the staple of the bolt, and then replaced it so, that, while it looked just as before, a good push would now send it into the middle of the room. Lastly, he slid the bolt into it, and having carefully removed all traces of disturbance, left the mysterious chamber by its own stair, and once more ascending to the passage, locked the door, and retired to his room with the key.

He had now plenty to think about beyond himself! Here certainly was some small support to the legend of the wizard earl. The stair which he had discovered, had been in common use at one time; its connection with other parts of the house had been cut off with an object; and by degrees it had come to be forgotten altogether: many villainies might have been effected by means of it. Mrs. Catanach must have discovered it the same night on which he found her there, had gone away by it then, and had certainly been making use of it since. When he smelt the sulphur, she must have been lighting a match.

It was now getting towards morning, and at last he was tired. He went to bed and fell asleep. When he woke, it was late, and as he dressed, he heard the noise of hoofs and wheels in the stable yard. He was sitting at breakfast in Mrs. Courthope's room, when she came in full of surprise at the sudden departure of her lord and lady. The marquis had rung for his man, and Lady Florimel for her maid, as soon as it was light; orders were sent at once to the stable; four horses were put to the travelling carriage; and they were gone, Mrs. Courthope could not tell whither.

Dreary as was the house without Florimel, things had turned out a shade or two better than Malcolm had expected, and he braced himself to endure his loss.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAIRD'S QUEST.

THINGS were going pretty well with the laird: Phemy and he drew yet closer to each other, and as he became yet more peaceful in her company, his thoughts flowed more freely, and his utterance grew less embarrassed; until at length, in talking with her, his speech was rarely broken with even a slight impediment, and a stranger might have overheard a long conversation between them without coming to any more disparaging conclusion in regard to him than that the hunchback was peculiar in mind as well as in body. But his nocturnal excursions continuing to cause her apprehension, and his representations of the delights to be gathered from Nature while she slept, at the same time alluring her greatly, Phemy had become, both for her own pleasure and his protection, anxious in these also to be his companion.

With a vital recognition of law, and great loyalty to any utterance of either parent, she had yet been brought up in an atmosphere of such liberty, that

except a thing were expressly so conditioned, or in itself appeared questionable, she never dreamed of asking permission to do it; and, accustomed as she had been to go with the laird everywhere, and to be out with him early and late, her conscience never suggested the possibility of any objection to her getting up at twelve, instead of four or five, to accompany him. It was some time, however, before the laird himself would consent; and then he would not unfrequently interpose with limitations, especially, if the night were not mild and dry, sending her always home again to bed. The mutual rule and obedience between them was something at once strange and lovely.

At midnight Phemy would enter the shop, and grope her way until she stood under the trap-door. This was the nearest she could come to the laird's chamber, for he had not only declined having the ladder stand there for his use, but had drawn a solemn promise from the carpenter that at night it should always be left slung up to the joists. For himself he had made a rope-ladder, which he could lower from beneath when he required it, invariably drew up after him, and never used for coming down.

One night Phemy made her customary signal by

knocking against the trap-door with a long slip of wood: it opened, and, as usual, the body of the laird appeared, hung for a moment in the square gap, like a huge spider, by its two hands, one on each side, then dropped straight to the floor, when, without a word, he hastened forth, and Phemy followed.

The night was very still—and rather dark, for it was cloudy about the horizon, and there was no moon. Hand-in-hand the two made for the shore—here very rocky—a succession of promontories with little coves between. Down into one of these they went by a winding path, and stood at the lip of the sea. A violet dimness, or, rather, a semi-transparent darkness, hung over it, through which came now and then a gleam, where the slow heave of some Triton shoulder caught a shine of the sky; a hush also, as of sleep, hung over it, which not to break, the wavelets of the rising tide carefully stilled their noises; and the dimness and the hush seemed one. They sat down on a rock that rose but a foot or two from the sand, and for some moments listened in silence to the inarticulate story of the night.

At length the laird turned to Phemy, and taking one of her hands in both of his, very solemnly said, as if breaking to her his life's trouble,—

"Phemy, I dinna ken whaur I cam frae."

"Hoot, laird! ye ken weel eneuch ye cam frae Go-od," answered Phemy, lengthening out the word with solemn utterance.

The laird did not reply, and again the night closed around them, and the sea hushed at their hearts. But a soft light air began to breathe from the south, and it waked the laird to more active thought.

"Gien he wad but come oot an' shaw himsel'!" he said. "What for disna he come oot?"

"Wha wad ye hae come oot?" asked Phemy.

"Ye ken wha, weel eneuch. They say he 's a' gait at ance: jist hearken. What for will he aye bide in, an' *never* come oot an' lat a puir body see him?"

The speech was broken into pauses, filled by the hush rather than noise of the tide, and the odour-like wandering of the soft air in the convolutions of their ears.

"The lown win' maun be his breath—sae quaiet! —He 's no hurryin' himsel' the nicht.—There 's never naebody rins efter *him*.—Eh, Phemy! I jist thoucht he was gauin' to speyk!"

This last exclamation he uttered in a whisper, as

the louder gush of a larger tide-pulse died away on the shore.

"Luik, Phemy, luik!" he resumed. "Luik oot yonner! Dinna ye see something 'at micht grow to something?"

His eyes were fixed on a faint spot of steely blue, out on the sea, not far from the horizon. It was hard to account for, with such a sky overhead, wherein was no lighter part to be seen that might be reflected in the water below; but neither of the beholders was troubled about its cause: there it glimmered on in the dimness of the wide night—a cold, faint splash of blue-gray.

"I dinna think muckle o' that, sir," said Phemy.

"It micht be the mark o' the sole o' his fut, though," returned the laird. "He micht hae jist setten 't doon, an' the watter hae lowed (*flamed*) up aboot it, an' the low no be willin' to gang oot! Luik sharp, Phemy; there may come anither at the neist stride—anither fut-mark. Luik ye that gait an' I'll luik this.—What for willna he come oot? The lift maun be fu' o' 'im, an' I 'm hungert for a sicht o' 'im. Gien ye see ony thing, Phemy, cry oot."

"What will I cry?" asked Phemy.

"Cry 'Father o' lichts!'" answered the laird.

"Will he hear to that—div ye think, sir?"

"Wha kens? He micht jist turn his heid; an' ae luik wad sair me for a hunner year."

"I s' cry, gien I see onything," said Phemy.

As they sat watching, by degrees the laird's thought swerved a little. His gaze had fixed on the northern horizon, where, as if on the outer threshold of some mighty door, long low clouds, with varied suggestion of recumbent animal forms, had stretched themselves, like creatures of the chase, watching for their lord to issue.

"Maybe he's no oot o' the hoose yet," he said. "Surely it canna be but he comes oot ilka nicht! He wad never hae made sic a sicht o' bonny things to lat them lie wi'oot onybody to gaither them! An' there's nae ill fowk the furth at this time o' nicht, to mak an oogly din, or disturb him wi' the sicht o' them. He maun come oot i' the quaiet o' the nicht, or else what's 't a' for?—Ay! he keeps the nicht till himsel', an' lea's the day to hiz (*us*). That 'll be what the deep sleep fa's upo' men for, doobtless—to haud them oot o' his gait! Eh! I wuss he wad come oot whan I was by! I micht get a glimp o' 'm.—Maybe he wad tak the hump aff o' me, an' set things in order i' my heid, an' mak me like ither fowk. Eh me!

that wad be gran'! Naebody wad daur to touch me syne. Eh, Michty! come oot! Father o' lichts! Father o' lichts!"

He went on repeating the words till, growing softer and softer, his voice died away in silence, and still as his seat of stone he sat, a new Job, on the verge of the world-waters, like the old Job on his dunghill when he cried out,—

"Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not; he passeth on also, but I perceive him not.—Call thou, and I will answer; or let me speak and answer thou me.—Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! —Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him."

At length he rose and wandered away from the shore, his head sunk upon his chest. Phemy rose also and followed him in silence. The child had little of the poetic element in her nature, but she had much of that from which everything else has to be developed—heart. When they reached the top of the brae, she joined him, and said, putting her hand in

his, but not looking at, or even turning towards him,—

"Maybe he 'll come oot upo' ye afore ye ken some day—whan ye 're no luikin' for him."

The laird stopped, gazed at her for a moment, shook his head, and walked on.

Grassy steeps everywhere met the stones and sands of the shore, and the grass and the sand melted, as it were, and vanished each in the other. Just where they met in the next hollow, stood a small building of stone with a tiled roof. It was now strangely visible through the darkness, for from every crevice a fire-illumined smoke was pouring. But the companions were not alarmed or even surprised. They bent their way towards it without hastening a step, and coming to a fence that enclosed a space around it, opened a little gate, and passed through. A sleepy watchman challenged them.

"It 's me," said the laird.

"A fine nicht, laird," returned the voice, and said no more.

The building was divided into several compartments, each with a separate entrance. On the ground in each burned four or five little wood fires, and the place was filled with smoke and glow. The smoke escaped partly by openings above the doors,

but mostly by the crannies of the tiled roof. Ere it reached these, however, it had to pass through a great multitude of pendent herrings. Hung up by the gills, layer above layer, nearly to the roof, their last tails came down as low as the laird's head. From beneath nothing was to be seen but a firmament of herring-tails. These fish were the last of the season, and were thus undergoing the process of kippering. It was a new venture in the place, and its success as yet a question.

The laird went into one of the compartments, and searching about a little amongst the multitude within his reach, took down a plump one, then cleared away the blazing wood from the top of one of the fires, and laid his choice upon the glowing embers beneath.

"What are ye duin' there, laird?" cried Phemy from without, whose nostrils the resulting odour had quickly reached. "The fish is no yours."

"Ye dinna think I wad tak it wantin' leave, Phemy!" returned the laird. "Mony a supper hae I made this w'y, an' mony anither I houp to mak. It'll no be this sizzon though, for this lot's the last o' them. They're fine aitin', but I'm some feart they winna keep."

"Wha gae ye leave, sir?" persisted Phemy showing herself the indivertible guardian of his morals as well as of his freedom.

"Ow, Mr. Runcie himsel', of coorse!" answered the laird. "—Wull I pit ane on to you?"

"Did ye speir leave for me tu?" asked the righteous maiden.

"Ow, na; but I 'll tell him the neist time I see him."

"I 'm nae for ony," said Phemy.

The fish wanted little cooking. The laird turned it, and after another half-minute of the fire, took it up by the tail, sat down on a stone beside the door, spread a piece of paper on his knees, laid the fish upon it, pulled a lump of bread from his pocket, and proceeded to make his supper. Ere he began, however, he gazed all around with a look which Phemy interpreted as a renewed search for the Father of lights, whom he would fain thank for his gifts. When he had finished, he threw the remnants into one of the fires, then went down to the sea, and there washed his face and hands in a rock-pool, after which they set off again, straying yet further along the coast.

One of the peculiarities in the friendship of the

strange couple was, that, although so closely attached, they should maintain such a large amount of mutual independence. They never quarrelled, but would flatly disagree, with never an attempt at compromise; the whole space between midnight and morning would sometimes glide by without a word spoken between them; and the one or the other would often be lingering far behind. As, however, the ultimate goal of the night's wandering was always understood between them, there was little danger of their losing each other.

On the present occasion, the laird, still full of his quest, was the one who lingered. Every few minutes he would stop and stare, now all around the horizon, now up to the zenith, now over the wastes of sky—for, any moment, from any spot in heaven, earth, or sea, the Father of lights might show foot, or hand, or face. He had at length seated himself on a lichen-covered stone with his head buried in his hands, as if, wearied with vain search for him outside, he would now look within and see if God might not be there, when suddenly a sharp exclamation from Phemy reached him. He listened.

"Rin! rin! rin!" she cried—the last word prolonged into a scream.

While it yet rang in his ears, the laird was halfway down the steep. In the open country he had not a chance; but, knowing every cranny in the rocks large enough to hide him, with anything like a start near enough to the shore for his short-lived speed, he was all but certain to evade his pursuers, especially in such a dark night as this.

He was not in the least anxious about Phemy, never imagining she might be less sacred in other eyes than in his, and knowing neither that her last cry of loving solicitude had gathered intensity from a cruel grasp, nor that while he fled in safety, she remained a captive.

Trembling and panting like a hare just escaped from the hounds, he squeezed himself into a cleft, where he sat half covered with water until the morning began to break. Then he drew himself out and crept along the shore, from point to point, with keen circumspection, until he was right under the village and within hearing of its inhabitants, when he ascended hurriedly, and ran home. But having reached his burrow, pulled down his rope ladder, and ascended, he found, with trebled dismay, that his loft had been invaded during the night. Several of the hooked cords had been cut away, on one or

two were shreds of clothing, and on the window-sill was a drop of blood.

He threw himself on the mound for a moment, then started to his feet, caught up his plaid, tumbled from the loft, and fled from Scaurnose as if a visible pestilence had been behind him.

CHAPTER XIV.

MALCOLM AND MRS. STEWART.

WHEN her parents discovered that Phemy was not in her garret, it occasioned them no anxiety. When they had also discovered that neither was the laird in his loft, and were naturally seized with the dread that some evil had befallen him, his hitherto invariable habit having been to house himself with the first gleam of returning day, they supposed that Phemy, finding he had not returned, had set out to look for him. As the day wore on, however, without her appearing, they began to be a little uneasy about her as well. Still the two might be together, and the explanation of their absence a very simple and satisfactory one; for a time therefore they refused to admit importunate disquiet. But before night, anxiety, like the slow but persistent waters of a flood, had insinuated itself through their whole being—nor theirs alone, but had so mastered and possessed the whole village that at length all employment was deserted, and every person capable joined in a search along the coast, fearing to find

their bodies at the foot of some cliff. The report spread to the neighbouring villages. In Portlossie Duncan went round with his pipes, arousing attention by a brief blast, and then crying the loss at every corner. As soon as Malcolm heard of it, he hurried to find Joseph, but the only explanation of their absence he was prepared to suggest was one that had already occurred to almost everybody—that the laird, namely, had been captured by the emissaries of his mother, and that, to provide against a rescue, they had carried off his companion with him—on which supposition, there was every probability that, within a few days at farthest, Phemy would be restored unhurt.

"There can be little doobt they hae gotten a grip o' 'm at last, puir fallow!" said Joseph. "But whatever's come till him, we canna sit doon an' ait oor mait ohn kent hoo Phemy's farin', puir wee lamb! Ye maun jist haud awa' ower to Kirkbyres, Ma'colm, an' get word o' yer mither, an' see gien onything can be made oot o' her."

The proposal fell on Malcolm like a great billow.

"Blue Peter," he said, looking him in the face, "I took it as a mark o' yer freen'ship 'at ye never spak the word to me. What richt has ony man to

ca' that wuman my mither? *I* hae never allooed it!"

"I'm thinkin'," returned Joseph, the more easily nettled that his horizon also was full of trouble, "your word upo' the maitter winna gang sae far 's John o' Groat's. Ye 'll no be suppeent for *your* witness upo' the pint."

"I wad as sune gang a mile intill the mou' o' hell, as gang to Kirkbyres!" said Malcolm.

"I hae my answer," said Peter, and turned away.

"But I s' gang," Malcolm went on. "The thing 'at maun be can be.—Only I tell ye this, Peter," he added, "—gien ever ye say sic a word 's yon i' my hearin' again, that is, afore the wuman has priven hersel' what she says, I s' gang by ye ever efter ohn spoken, for I 'll ken 'at ye want nae mair o' *me*."

Joseph, who had been standing with his back to his friend, turned and held out his hand. Malcolm took it.

"Ae queston afore I gang, Peter," he said. "—What for didna ye tell me what fowk was sayin' aboot me—anent Lizzy Findlay?"

"'Cause I didna believe a word o' 't, an' I wasna gaein' to add to yer troubles."

"Lizzy never mootit sic a thing?"

"Never."

"I was sure o' that!—Noo I 'll awa' to Kirkbyres—God help me! I wad raither face Sawtan an' his muckle tyke.—But dinna ye expec' ony news. Gien yon ane kens, she's a' the surer no to tell. Only ye sanna say I didna du my best for ye."

It was the hardest trial of the will Malcolm had yet had to encounter. Trials of submission he had had, and tolerably severe ones; but to go and do what the whole feeling recoils from, is to be weighed only against abstinence from what the whole feeling urges towards. He walked determinedly home. Stoat saddled a horse for him while he changed his dress, and once more he set out for Kirkbyres.

Had Malcolm been at the time capable of attempting an analysis of his feeling towards Mrs. Stewart, he would have found it very difficult to effect. Satisfied as he was of the untruthful—even cruel nature of the woman who claimed him, and conscious of a strong repugnance to any nearer approach between them, he was yet aware of a certain indescribable fascination in her. This, however, only caused him to recoil from her the more—partly from dread lest it *might* spring from the relation asserted, and partly that, whatever might be its root, it wrought upon him in a manner he scarcely disliked the less that

it certainly had nothing to do with the filial. But his feelings were too many and too active to admit of the analysis of any one of them, and ere he reached the house his mood had grown fierce.

He was shown into a room where the fire had not been many minutes lighted. It had long narrow windows, over which the ivy had grown so thick, that he was in it some moments ere he saw through the dusk that it was a library—not half the size of that at Lossie House, but far more ancient, and, although evidently neglected, more study-like.

A few minutes passed, then the door softly opened, and Mrs. Stewart glided swiftly across the floor with outstretched arms.

"At last!" she said, and would have clasped him to her bosom.

But Malcolm stepped back.

"Na, na, mem!" he said; "it taks twa to that!"

"Malcolm!" she exclaimed, her voice trembling with emotion—of some kind.

"Ye may ca' me your son, mem, but I ken nae gr'un' yet for ca'in' you my——"

He could not say the word.

"That is very true, Malcolm," she returned gently; "but this interview is not of my seeking. I wish

to precipitate nothing. So long as there is a single link, or half a link even, missing from the chain of which one end hangs at my heart—"

She paused, with her hand on her bosom, apparently to suppress rising emotion. Had she had the sentence ready for use?

"—I will not subject myself," she went on, "to such treatment as it seems I must look for from you. It is hard to lose a son, but it is harder yet to find him again after he has utterly ceased to be one."

Here she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Till the matter is settled, however," she resumed, "let us be friends—or at least not enemies.—What did you come for now?—Not to insult me, surely?—Is there anything I can do for you?"

Malcolm felt the dignity of her behaviour, but not the less, after his own straightforward manner answered her question to the point.

"I cam aboot naething concernin' mysel', mem, I cam to see whether ye kent onything aboot Phemy Mair."

"Is it a wo——?—I don't even know who she is.—You don't mean the young woman that ——?—Why do you come to me about her? Who is she?"

Malcolm hesitated a moment: if she really did not know what he meant, was there any risk in telling her? But he saw none.

"Wha is she, mem!" he returned. "—I whiles think she maun be the laird's guid angel, though in shape she's but a wee bit lassie. She maks up for a heap to the laird.—Him an' her, mem, they 've disappeart thegither, naebody kens whaur."

Mrs. Stewart laughed a low unpleasant laugh, but made no other reply. Malcolm went on.

"An' it's no to be wonnert at gien fowk wull hae 't 'at ye maun ken something aboot it, mem."

"I know nothing whatever," she returned emphatically. "Believe me or not, as you please," she added, with heightened colour. "If I did know anything," she went on, with apparent truthfulness, "I don't know that I should feel bound to tell it. As it is, however, I can only say I know nothing of either of them. That I do say most solemnly."

Malcolm turned,—satisfied at least that he could learn no more.

"You are not going to leave me so?" the lady said, and her face grew "sad as sad could be."

"There's naething mair atween 's, mem," answered Malcolm, without turning even his face.

"You will be sorry for treating me so some day."

"Weel than, mem, I will be; but that day's no the day (*to-day*)."

"Think what you could do for your poor witless brother, if——"

"Mem," interrupted Malcolm, turning right round and drawing himself up in anger, "priv' 'at I 'm your son, an' that meenute I speir at you wha was my father."

Mrs. Stewart changed colour—neither with the blush of innocence nor with the pallor of guilt, but with the gray of mingled rage and hatred. She took a step forward with the quick movement of a snake about to strike, but stopped midway, and stood looking at him with glittering eyes, teeth clenched, and lips half open.

Malcolm returned her gaze for a moment or two.

"*Ye* never was the mither, whaever was the father o' me!" he said, and walked out of the room.

He had scarcely reached the door, when he heard a heavy fall, and looking round saw the lady lying motionless on the floor. Thoroughly on his guard, however, and fearful both of her hatred and her blandishments, he only made the more haste down stairs, where he found a maid and sent her to

attend to her mistress. In a minute he was mounted and trotting fast home, considerably happier than before, inasmuch as he was now almost beyond doubt convinced that Mrs. Stewart was not his mother.

CHAPTER XV.

AN HONEST PLOT.

EVER since the visit of condolence with which the narrative of these events opened, there had been a coolness between Mrs. Mellis and Miss Horn. Mr. Mellis's shop was directly opposite Miss Horn's house, and his wife's parlour was over the shop, looking into the street; hence the two neighbours could not but see each other pretty often; beyond a stiff nod, however, no sign of smouldering friendship had as yet broken out. Miss Horn was consequently a good deal surprised when, having gone into the shop to buy some trifle, Mr. Mellis informed her, in all but a whisper, that his wife was very anxious to see her alone for a moment, and begged her to have the goodness to step up to the parlour. His customer gave a small snort, betraying her first impulse to resentment, but her nobler nature, which was never far from the surface, constrained her compliance.

Mrs. Mellis rose hurriedly when the plumb-line figure of her neighbour appeared, ushered in by her

husband, and received her with a somewhat embarrassed *empressement*, arising from the consciousness of good-will disturbed by the fear of imputed meddlesomeness. She knew the inward justice of Miss Horn, however, and relied upon that, even while she encouraged herself by waking up the ever present conviction of her own superiority in the *petite morale* of social intercourse. Her general tendency indeed was to look down upon Miss Horn: is it not usually the less that looks down on the greater? I had almost said it must be, for that the less only *can* look down; but that would not hold absolutely in the kingdoms of this world, while in the kingdom of heaven it is all looking up.

"Sit ye doon, Miss Horn," she said; "it 's a lang time sin' we had a news thegither."

Miss Horn seated herself with a begrudged acquiescence.

Had Mrs. Mellis been more of a tactician, she would have dug a few approaches ere she opened fire upon the fortress of her companion's fair-hearing; but instead of that, she at once discharged the imprudent question:

"Was ye at hame last nicht, mem, atween the hoors o' aucht an' nine?"—a shot which instantly

awoke in reply the whole battery of Miss Horn's indignation.

"Wha am I, to be speirt sic a queston? Wha but yersel' wad hae daurt it, Mistress Mellis?"

"Huly (*softly*), huly, Miss Horn!" expostulated her questioner. "I hae no wuss to pry intill ony secrets o' yours, or—"

"Secrets!" shouted Miss Horn!

But her consciousness of good intent, and all but assurance of final victory, upheld Mrs. Mellis.

"—or Jean's aither," she went on, apparently regardless; "but I wad fain be sure ye kent a' aboot yer ain hoose 'at a body micht chance to see frae the croon o' the caus'ay (*middle of the street*)."

"The parlour-blind 's gane up crookit sin' ever that thoomb-fingert cratur, Watty Witherspail, made a new roller till 't. Gien 't be that ye mean, Mistress Mellis,—"

"Hoots!" returned the other. "—Hoo far can ye lippen to that Jean o' yours, mem?"

"Nae farer nor the len'th o' my nose, an' the breid o' my twa een," was the scornful answer.

Although, however, she thus manifested her resentment of Mrs. Mellis's catechetical attempts at introducing her subject, Miss Horn had no desire to pre-

vent the free outcome of her approaching communication.

"In that case, I may speyk oot," said Mrs. Mellis.

"Use yer freedom."

"Weel, I wull. Ye was hardly oot o' the hoose last nicht, afore—"

"Ye saw me gang oot?"

"Ay did I."

"What gart ye speir than? What for sud a body come screwin' up a straucht stair—noo the face an' noo the back o' her?"

"Weel, I nott (*needed*) na hae speirt. But that's naething to the p'int.—Ye hadna been gane, as I was sayin', ower a five meenutes, whan in cam a licht intill the bedroom neist the parlour, an' Jean appeart, wi' a can'le in her han'. There was nae licht i' this room but the licht o' the fire, an' no muckle o' that, for 'twas maistly peat, sae I saw her weel eneuch ohn been seen mysel'. She cam straucht to the window, and drew doon the blind, but lost hersel' a bit or she wad never hae set doon her can'le whaur it cuist a shaidow o' hersel' an' her duin's upo' the blind."

"An' what was 't she was efter, the jaud?" cried Miss Horn, without any attempt to conceal her growing interest.

"She made naething o' 't, whatever it was; for doon the street cam the schuilmaister, an' chappit at the door, an' gaed in an' waitit till ye cam hame."

"Weel!?" said Miss Horn.

But Mrs. Mellis held her peace.

"Weel!!?" repeated Miss Horn.

"Weel," returned Mrs. Mellis, with a curious mixture of deference and conscious sagacity in her tone, "a' 'at I tak upo' me to say is—Think ye twise afore ye lippen to that Jean o' yours."

"I lippen naething till her! I wad as sune lippen to the dottle o' a pipe amo' dry strae. What saw ye, Mistress Mellis?"

"Ye needna speyk like that," returned Mrs. Mellis, for Miss Horn's tone was threatening; "I'm no Jean."

"What saw ye?" repeated Miss Horn, more gently, but not less eagerly.

"Whause is that kist o' mahogany drawers i' that bedroom, gien I may preshume to speir?"

"Whause but mine?"

"They 're no Jean's?"

"Jean's!!"

"Ye micht hae latten her keep her bit duds i' them, for onything I kent!"

"Jean's duds i' my Grizel's drawers! A lik'ly thing!"

"Hm! They war poor Miss Cam'ell's, war they?"

"They war Grizel Cam'ell's drawers as lang's she had use for ony; but what for ye sud say *poor* till her, I dinna ken, 'cep' it be 'at she's gane whaur they haena muckle 'at needs layin' in drawers. That's neither here nor there.—Div ye tell me 'at Jean was intromittin' wi thae drawers? They're a' lockit, ilk ane o' them—an' they're guid locks."

"No ower guid to hae keyes to them—are they?"

"The keyes are i' my pooch," said Miss Horn, clapping her hand to the skirt of her dress. "They're aye i' my pooch, though I haena had the feelin's to mak use o' them sin' she left me."

"Are ye sure they war there last nicht, mem?"

Miss Horn seemed struck.

"I had on my black silk last nicht!" she answered vaguely, and was silent, pondering doubtfully.

"Weel, mem, jist ye put on yer black silk again the morn's nicht, an' come ower here aboot aucht o'clock; an' ye 'll be able to jeedge by her ongang whan ye're no i' the hoose, gien there be onything amiss wi' Jean. There canna be muckle ill dune yet—that's a comfort!"

"What ill, by (*beyond*) meddlin' wi' what doesna concern her, cud the wuman du?" said Miss Horn, with attempted confidence.

"That ye sud ken best yersel', mem. But Jean's an awfu' gossip, an' a lady like yer cousin micht hae left dockiments ahint her 'at she wadna jist like to hear procleemt frae the hoose-tap. No 'at *she*'ll ever hear onything mair, poor thing!"

"What mean ye?" cried Miss Horn, half frightened, half angry.

"Jist what I say—neither mair nor less," returned Mrs. Mellis. "Miss Cam'ell may weel hae left letters for enstance, an' hoo wad they fare in Jean's han's?"

"Whan *I* never had the hert to open her drawers!" exclaimed Miss Horn, enraged at the very notion of the crime. "*I* hae *nae* feelin's, thank God for the furnishin' o' me!"

"I doobt Jean has her full share o' a' feelin's belangin' to fallen human natur'," said Mrs. Mellis, with a slow horizontal oscillation of her head. "But ye jist come an' see wi' yer ain een, an' syne jeedge for yersel': it 's no business o' mine."

"I'll come the nicht, Mistress Mellis. Only lat it be atween 's twa."

"I can haud my tongue, mem,—that is, frae a' but

ane. Sae lang 's merried fowk sleeps in ae bed, it 's ill to haud onything till a body's sel'."

"Mr. Mellis is a douce man, an' I carena what he kens," answered Miss Horn.

She descended to the shop, and having bought bulk enough to account to Jean for her lengthened stay, for she had beyond a doubt been watching the door of the shop, she crossed the street, went up to her parlour, and rang the bell. The same moment Jean's head was popped in at the door: she had her reasons for always answering the bell like a bullet.

"Mem?" said Jean.

"Jean, I'm gaein' oot the nicht. The minister oucht to be spoken till aboot the schuilmaister, honest man. Tak the lantren wi' ye to the manse aboot ten o'clock. That 'll be time eneuch."

"Verra weel, mem. But I'm thinkin' there 's a mune the nicht."

"Naething but the doup o' ane, Jean. It 's no to ca' a mune. It 's a mercy we hae lantrens, an' sic a sicht o' cairds (*gipsies*) aboot."

"Ay, the lantren lats them see whaur ye are, an' haud oot o' yer gait," said Jean, who happened not to relish going out that night.

"Troth, wuman, ye 're richt there!" returned

her mistress, with cheerful assent. "The mair they see o' ye, the less they 'll meddle wi' ye—caird or cadger. Haud ye the licht upo' yer ain face, lass, an' there 's feow 'ill hae the hert to luik again."

"Haith, mem, there 's twa sic like o' 's!" returned Jean bitterly, and bounced from the room.

"That 's true tu," said her mistress—adding after the door was shut, "It 's a peety we cudna haud on thegither."

"I'm gaein' noo, Jean," she called into the kitchen as she crossed the threshold at eight o'clock.

She turned towards the head of the street, in the direction of the manse; but, out of the range of Jean's vision, made a circuit, and entered Mr. Mellis's house by the garden at the back.

In the parlour she found a supper prepared to celebrate the renewal of old goodwill. The clear crystal on the table; the new loaf so brown without and so white within; the rich, clear-complexioned butter, undebased with a particle of salt; the self-satisfied hum of the kettle in attendance for the guidman's toddy; the bright fire, the golden glow of the brass fender in its red light, and the dish of boiled potatoes set down before it, under a snowy cloth; the pink eggs, the yellow haddock, and the

crimson strawberry jam; all combined their influences—each with its private pleasure wondrously heightened by the zest of a secret watch and the hope of discomfited mischief—to draw into a friendship what had hitherto been but a somewhat insecure neighbourship. From below came the sound of the shutters which Mr. Mellis was putting up a few minutes earlier than usual; and when presently they sat down to the table, and, after prologue judged suitable, proceeded to enjoy the good things before them, an outside observer would have thought they had a pleasant evening, if not Time himself, by the forelock.

But Miss Horn was uneasy. The thought of what Jean *might* have already discovered had haunted her all day long; for her reluctance to open her cousin's drawers had arisen mainly from the dread of finding justified a certain painful suspicion which had haunted the whole of her intercourse with Grizel Campbell—namely, that the worm of a secret had been lying at the root of her life, the cause of all her illness, and of her death at last. She had fought with, out-argued, and banished the suspicion a thousand times while she was with her, but evermore it had returned; and now since

her death, when again and again on the point of turning over her things, she had been always deterred by the fear, not so much of finding what would pain herself, as of discovering what Grizel would not wish her to know. Never was there a greater contrast between form and reality, between person and being, between manner and nature, than existed in Margaret Horn: the shell was rough, the kernel absolute delicacy. Not for a moment had her suspicion altered her behaviour to the gentle suffering creature towards whom she had adopted the relation of an elder and stronger sister. To herself, when most satisfied of the existence of a secret, she steadily excused her cousin's withholdment of confidence, on the ground of her own lack of feelings: how could she unbosom herself to such as she! And now the thought of eyes like Jean's exploring Grizel's forsaken treasures, made her so indignant and restless that she could hardly even pretend to enjoy her friends' hospitality.

Mrs. Mellis had so arranged the table and their places, that she and her guest had only to lift their eyes to see the window of their watch, while she punished her husband for the virile claim to

greater freedom from curiosity by seating him with his back to it, which made him every now and then cast a fidgety look over his shoulder—not greatly to the detriment of his supper, however. Their plan was, to extinguish their own the moment Jean's light should appear, and so watch without the risk of counter-discovery.

"There she comes!" cried Mrs. Mellis; and her husband and Miss Horn made such haste to blow out the candle, that they knocked their heads together, blew in each other's face, and the first time missed it. Jean approached the window with hers in her hand, and pulled down the blind. But, alas, beyond the form of a close-bent elbow moving now and then across a corner of the white field, no shadow appeared upon it!

Miss Horn rose.

"Sit doon, mem, sit doon; ye hae naething to gang upo' yet," exclaimed Mr. Mellis, who, being a baillie, was an authority.

"I can sit nae langer, Mr. Mellis," returned Miss Horn. "I hae eneuch to gang upo' as lang's I hae my ain flure aneth my feet: the wuman has no business there. I'll jist slip across an' gang in, as quaiet as a sowl intill a boady; but I s'

warran' I s' mak a din afore I come oot again!"

With a grim diagonal nod she left the room.

Although it was now quite dark, she yet deemed it prudent to go by the garden-gate into the back lane, and so cross the street lower down. Opening her own door noiselessly, thanks to Jean, who kept the lock well oiled for reasons of Mrs. Catanach's, she closed it as silently, and, long-boned as she was, crept up the stair like a cat. The light was shining from the room; the door was ajar. She listened at it for a moment, and could distinguish nothing; then fancying she heard the rustle of paper, could bear it no longer, pushed the door open, and entered. There stood Jean, staring at her with fear-blanched face, a deep top-drawer open before her, and her hands full of things she was in the act of replacing. Her terror culminated, and its spell broke in a shriek, when her mistress sprang upon her like a tigress.

The watchers in the opposite house heard no cry, and only saw a heave of two intermingled black shadows across the blind, after which they neither heard nor saw anything more. The light went on burning until its final struggle with the darkness began, when it died with many a flickering

throb. Unable at last to endure the suspense, now growing to fear, any longer, they stole across the street, opened the door, and went in. Over the kitchen-fire, like an evil spirit of the squabby order, crouched Mrs. Catanach, waiting for Jean; no one else was to be found.

About ten o'clock the same evening, as Mr. Graham sat by his peat fire, some one lifted the latch of the outer door and knocked at the inner. His invitation to enter was answered by the appearance of Miss Horn, gaunt and grim as usual, but with more than the wonted fire gleaming from the shadowy cavern of her bonnet. She made no apology for the lateness of her visit, but seated herself at the other side of the deal table, and laid upon it a paper parcel, which she proceeded to open with much deliberation and suppressed plenitude. Having at length untied the string with the long fingers of a hand which, notwithstanding its evident strength, trembled so as almost to defeat the attempt, she took from the parcel a packet of old letters sealed with spangled wax; and pushed it across the table to the schoolmaster, saying—

"Hae, Sandy Graham! Naebody but yersel' has a richt to say what's to be dune wi' *them*."

He put out his hand and took them gently, with a look of sadness but no surprise.

"Dinna think I hae been readin' them, Sandy Graham. Na, na! I wad read nae honest man's letters, be they written to wha they micht."

Mr. Graham was silent.

"Ye're a guid man, Sandy Graham," Miss Horn resumed, "gien God ever took the pains to mak ane. Dinna think onything atween you an' her wad hae brocht me at this time o' nicht to disturb ye in yer ain chaumer. Na, na! Whatever was atween you twa had an honest man intill't, an' I wad hae taen my time to gie ye back yer dockiments. But there's some o' anither mark here."

As she spoke, she drew from the parcel a small cardboard box, broken at the sides, and tied with a bit of tape. This she undid, and, turning the box upside down, tumbled its contents out on the table before him.

"What mak ye o' sic like as thae?" she said.

"Do you want me to——?" asked the schoolmaster with trembling voice.

"I jist div," she answered.

They were a number of little notes—some of but a word or two, and signed with initials; others

longer, and signed in full. Mr. Graham took up one of them reluctantly, and unfolded it softly.

He had hardly looked at it when he started and exclaimed,—

"God have mercy! What can be the date of this?"

There was no date to it. He held it in his hand for a minute, his eyes fixed on the fire, and his features almost convulsed with his efforts at composure; then laid it gently on the table, and said but without turning his eyes to Miss Horn,—

"I cannot read this. You must not ask me. It refers doubtless to the time when Miss Campbell was governess to Lady Annabel. I see no end to be answered by *my* reading one of these letters."

"I daursay! Wha ever saw 'at wadna luik?" returned Miss Horn, with a glance keen as an eagle's into the thoughtful eyes of her friend.

"Why not do by the writer of these as you have done by me? Why not take them to him?" suggested Mr. Graham.

"That wad be but thoomb-fingert wark—to lat gang the en' o' yer hank!" exclaimed Miss Horn.

"I do not understand you, ma'am."

"Weel, I maun gar ye un'erstan' me. There's things whiles, Sandy Graham, 'at 's no easy to speyk aboot—but I hae nae feelin's, an' we 'll a' be deid or lang, an' that 's a comfort. Man 'at ye are, ye 're the only human bein' I wad open my moo' till aboot this maitter, an' that 's 'cause ye lo'e the memory o' my puir lassie, Grizel Cam'ell."

"It is not her memory, it is herself I love," said the schoolmaster with trembling voice. "Tell me what you please: you may trust me."

"Gien I needit you to tell me that, I wad trust ye as I wad the black dog wi' butter! —Hearken, Sandy Graham."

The result of her communication and their following conference was, that she returned about midnight with a journey before her, the object of which was to place the letters in the safe keeping of a lawyer friend in the neighbouring county town.

Long before she reached home, Mrs. Catanach had left—not without communication with her ally, in spite of a certain precaution adopted by her mistress, the first thing the latter did when she entered being to take the key of the cellar stairs from her pocket, and release Jean, who issued crest-fallen and miserable, and was sternly dismissed to bed.

The next day, however, for reasons of her own, Miss Horn permitted her to resume her duties about the house without remark, as if nothing had happened serious enough to render further measures necessary.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SACRAMENT.

ABANDONING all her remaining effects to Jean's curiosity, if indeed it were no worse demon that possessed her, Miss Horn, carrying a large reticule, betook herself to the Lossie Arms, to await the arrival of the mail coach from the west, on which she was pretty sure of a vacant seat.

It was a still, frosty, finger-pinching dawn, and the rime lay thick wherever it could lie; but Miss Horn's red nose was carried in front of her in a manner that suggested nothing but defiance to the fiercest attacks of cold. Declining the offered shelter of the landlady's parlour, she planted herself on the steps of the inn, and there stood until the sound of the guard's horn came crackling through the frosty air, heralding the apparition of a flaming chariot, fit for the sun-god himself, who was now lifting his red radiance above the horizon. Having none inside, the guard gallantly offered his one lady-passenger a place in the heart of his vehicle, but she declined the attention—to him, on the

ground of preferring the outside,—for herself, on the ground of uncertainty whether he had a right to bestow the privilege. But there was such a fire in her heart that no frost could chill her; such a bright bow in her west, that the sun now rising in the world's east was but a reflex of its splendour. True, the cloud against which it glowed was very dark with by-gone wrong and suffering, but so much the more brilliant seemed the hope now arching the entrance of the future. Still, although she never felt the cold, and the journey was but of a few miles, it seemed long and wearisome to her active spirit, which would gladly have sent her tall person striding along, to relieve both by the discharge of the excessive generation of muscle-working electricity.

At length the coach drove into the town, and stopped at the Duff Arms. Miss Horn descended, straightened her long back with some difficulty, shook her feet, loosened her knees, and after a douceur to the guard more liberal than was customary, in acknowledgment of the kindness she had been unable to accept, marched off with the stride of a grenadier to find her lawyer.

Their interview did not relieve her of much of

the time, which now hung upon her like a cloak of lead, and the earliness of the hour would not have deterred her from at once commencing a round of visits to the friends she had in the place; but the gates of the lovely environs of Fife House stood open, and although there were no flowers now, and the trees were leafless, waiting in poverty and patience for their coming riches, they drew her with the offer of a plentiful loneliness and room. She accepted it, entered, and for two hours wandered about their woods and walks.

Entering with her the well known domain, the thought meets me: what would be the effect on us men of such a periodical alternation between nothing and abundance as these woods undergo? Perhaps in the endless variety of worlds there may be one in which that is among the means whereby its dwellers are saved from self and lifted into life; a world in which during the one half of the year they walk in state, in splendour, in bounty, and during the other are plunged in penury and labour.

Such speculations were not in Miss Horn's way; but she was better than the loftiest of speculations, and we will follow her. By-and-by she came out of the woods, and found herself on the

banks of the Wan Water, a broad, fine river, here talking in wide-rippled innocence from bank to bank, there lying silent and motionless and gloomy, as if all the secrets of the drowned since the creation of the world lay dim-floating in its shadowy bosom. In great sweeps it sought the ocean, and the trees stood back from its borders, leaving a broad margin of grass between, as if the better to see it go. Just outside the grounds, and before reaching the sea, it passed under a long bridge of many arches—then, trees and grass and flowers and all greenery left behind, rushed through a waste of storm-heaped pebbles into the world-water. Miss Horn followed it out of the grounds and on to the beach.

Here its channel was constantly changing. Even while she stood gazing at its rapid rush, its bank of pebbles and sand fell almost from under her feet. But her thoughts were so busy that she scarcely observed even what she saw, and hence it was not strange that she should be unaware of having been followed and watched all the way. Now from behind a tree, now from a corner of the mausoleum, now from behind a rock, now over the parapet of the bridge, the mad laird had watched her. From

a heap of shingle on the opposite side of the Wan Water, he was watching her now. Again and again he had made a sudden movement as if to run and accost her, but had always drawn back again and concealed himself more carefully than before.

At length she turned in the direction of the town. It was a quaint old place—a royal burgh for five centuries, with streets irregular and houses of much individuality. Most of the latter were humble in appearance, bare and hard in form, and gray in hue; but there were curious corners, low archways, uncompromising gables, some with corbel-steps—now and then an outside stair, a delicious little dormer window, or a gothic doorway, sometimes with a bit of carving over it.

With the bent head of the climber, Miss Horn was walking up a certain street, called from its precipitousness the Strait, that is *Difficult*, Path—an absolute Hill of Difficulty, when she was accosted by an elderly man, who stood in the doorway of one of the houses.

"Ken ye wha 's yon watchin' ye frae the tap o the brae, mem?" he said.

Miss Horn looked up: there was no one there.

"That 's it! he 's awa' again! That 's the w'y he 's been duin' this last hoor, at least, to *my* knowledge. I saw him watchin' ilka mov' ye made, mem, a' the time ye was doon upo' the shore—an' there he is noo, or was a meenute ago, at the heid o' the brae, glowerin' the een oot o' 's heid at ye, mem!"

"Div ye ken him?" asked Miss Horn.

"No, mem—'cep' by sicht o' ee; he hasna been lang aboot the toon. Some fowk says he 's dementit; but he 's unco quaiet, speyks to nobody, an' gien onybody speyk to him, jist rins. Cud he be kennin' you, no? Ye 're a stranger here, mem."

"No sic a stranger, John!" returned Miss Horn, calling the man by his name, for she recognized him as the beadle of the parish church. "What 's the body like?"

"A puir, wee, hump-backit cratur, wi' the face o' a gentleman."

"I ken him weel," said Miss Horn. "He *is* a gentleman—gien ever God made ane. But he 's sair afflickit. Whaur does he lie at nicht—can ye tell me?"

"I ken naething aboot him, mem, by what comes o' seein' him sic like 's the day, an' ance teetin (*peering*) in at the door o' the kirk. I wad hae

weised him till a seat, but the moment I luikit at him, awa' he ran. He 's unco cheenged, though, sin' the first time I saw him."

Since he lost Annie, fear had been slaying him. No one knew where he slept; but in the daytime he haunted the streets, judging them safer than the fields or woods. The moment any one accosted him, however, he fled like the wind. He had "no art to find the mind's construction in the face;" and not knowing whom to trust, he distrusted all. Humanity was good in his eyes, but there was no man. The vision of Miss Horn was like the day-spring from on high to him; with her near, the hosts of the Lord seemed to encamp around him; but the one word he had heard her utter about his back, had caused in him an invincible repugnance to appearing before her, and hence it was that at a distance he had haunted her steps without nearer approach

There was indeed a change upon him! His clothes hung about him—not from their own ragged condition only, but also from the state of skin and bone to which he was reduced, his hump showing like a great peg over which they had been carelessly cast. Half the round of his eyes stood out

from his face, whose pallor betokened the ever recurring rush of the faintly sallying troops back to the citadel of the heart. He had always been ready to run, but now he looked as if nothing but weakness and weariness kept him from running always. Miss Horn had presently an opportunity of marking the sad alteration.

For ere she reached the head of the Strait Path, she heard sounds as of boys at play, and coming out on the level of the High Street, saw a crowd, mostly of little boys, in the angle made by a garden wall with a house whose gable stood half-way across the pavement. It being Saturday, they had just left school in all the exuberance of spirits to which a half holiday gives occasion. In most of them the animal nature was, for the time at least, far wider awake than the human, and their proclivity towards the sport of the persecutor was strong. To them any living thing that looked at once odd and helpless was an outlaw—a creature to be tormented, or at best hunted beyond the visible world. A meagre cat, an over-fed pet spaniel, a ditchless frog, a horse whose days hung over the verge of the knacker's yard—each was theirs in virtue of the amusement latent in it, which it was

their business to draw out; but of all such property an idiot would yield the most, and a hunchback idiot, such as was the laird in their eyes, was absolutely invaluable—beyond comparison the best game in the known universe. When he left Portlossie, the laird knew pretty well what risks he ran, although he preferred even them to the dangers he hoped by his flight to avoid. It was he whom the crowd in question surrounded.

They had begun by rough teasing, to which he had responded with smiles—a result which did not at all gratify them, their chief object being to enrage him. They had therefore proceeded to small torments, and were ready to go on to worse, their object being with the laird hard to compass. Unhappily, there were amongst them two or three bigger boys.

The moment Miss Horn descried what they were about, she rushed into the midst of them, like a long bolt from a catapult, and scattering them right and left from their victim, turned and stood in front of him, regarding his persecutors with defiance in her flaming eye, and vengeance in her indignant nose. But there was about Miss Horn herself enough of the peculiar to mark her also, to the

superficial observer, as the natural prey of boys; and the moment the first billow of consternation had passed and sunk, beginning to regard her as she stood, the vain imagination awoke in these young lords of misrule. They commenced their attack upon her by resuming it upon her protégé. She spread out her skirts, far from voluminous, to protect him as he cowered behind them, and so long as she was successful in shielding him, her wrath smouldered—but powerfully. At length one of the bigger boys, creeping slyly up behind the front row of smaller ones, succeeded in poking a piece of iron rod past her, and drawing a cry from the laird. Out blazed the lurking flame. The boy had risen, and was now attempting to prosecute like an ape, what he had commenced like a snake. Inspired by the God of armies—the Lord of hosts, she rushed upon him, and struck him into the gutter. He fell in the very spot where he had found his weapon, and there he lay. The Christian Amazon turned to the laird; overflowing with compassion she stooped and kissed his forehead, then took him by the hand to lead him away. But most of the enemy had gathered around their fallen comrade, and seized with some anxiety as to his

condition, Miss Horn approached the group: the instant she turned towards it, the laird snatched his hand from hers, darted away like a hunting spider, and shot down the Strait Path to the low street: by the time his protectress had looked over the heads of the group, seen that the young miscreant was not seriously injured, and requested him to take that for meddling with a helpless innocent, the object of her solicitude, whom she supposed standing behind her, was nowhere to be seen. Twenty voices, now obsequious, were lifted to acquaint her with the direction in which he had gone; but it was vain to attempt following him, and she pursued her way, somewhat sore at his want of faith in her, to the house of a certain relative, a dressmaker, whom she visited as often as she went to Duff Harbour.

Now Miss Forsyth was one of a small sect of worshippers which had, not many years before, built a chapel in the town—a quiet, sober, devout company, differing from their neighbours in nothing deeply touching the welfare of humanity. Their chief fault was, that, attributing to comparative trifles a hugely disproportionate value, they would tear the garment in pieces rather than yield

their notion of the right way of wrapping it together.

It so happened that, the next morning, a minister famous in the community was to preach to them, on which ground Miss Forsyth persuaded her relative to stop over the Sunday, and go with her to their chapel. Bethinking herself next that her minister had no sermon to prepare, she took Miss Horn to call upon him.

Mr. Bigg was one of those men whose faculty is always under-estimated by their acquaintances and over-estimated by their friends; to overvalue him was impossible. He was not merely of the salt of the earth, but of the leaven of the kingdom, contributing more to the true life of the world than many a thousand far more widely-known and honoured. Such as this man are the chief springs of thought, feeling, inquiry, action, in their neighbourhood; they radiate help and breathe comfort; they reprove, they counsel, they sympathize; in a word, they are doorkeepers of the house of God. Constantly upon its threshold, and every moment pushing the door to peep in, they let out radiance enough to keep the hearts of men believing in the light. They make an atmosphere about them in

which spiritual things can thrive, and out of their school often come men who do greater things, better they cannot do, than they.

Although a separatist as to externals, he was in heart a most catholic man—would have found himself far too catholic for the community over which he presided, had its members been capable of understanding him. Indeed, he had with many, although such was the force of his character that no one dared a word to that effect in his hearing, the reputation of being lax in his ideas of what constituted a saving faith; and most of the sect being very narrow-minded, if not small-hearted, in their limitations of the company fitly partaking of the last supper of our Lord—requiring proof of intellectual accord with themselves as to the *how* and *why* of many things, especially in regard of what they called the plan of salvation, he was generally judged to be misled by the deceitful kindliness of the depraved human heart in requiring as the ground of communion only such an uplook to Jesus as, when on earth, Jesus himself had responded to with healing. He was larger-hearted, and *therefore* larger-minded, than his people.

In the course of their conversation, Miss Forsyth

recounted, with some humour, her visitor's prowess on behalf of the laird—much to honest Mr. Bigg's delight.

"What ither cud I du?" said Miss Horn apologetically. "But I doobt I strack ower sair. Maybe ye wadna objec', sir, to gang and speir efter the laddie, an' gie him some guid advice?"

"I'll do that," returned Mr. Bigg.—"Are we to have the pleasure of your company in our conventicle to-morrow?" he added, after a little pause. "Dr. Blare is going to preach."

"Will ye hae me, Mr. Bigg?"

"Most willingly, ma'am; and we'll be still better pleased if you'll sit down with us to the Lord's table afterwards."

"I gang to the perris-kirk, ye ken," said Miss Horn, supposing the good man unaware of the fact.

"Oh! I know that, ma'am. But don't you think, as we shall, I trust, sit down together to his heavenly supper, it would be a good preparation to sit down together, once at least, to his earthly supper first?"

"I didna ken 'at ye wad hae ony but yer ain fowk! I hae aften thoucht mysel', it was jist the ae thing ony Christi-an sud be ready to du wi' ony

ither. Is 't a new thing wi' ye to haud open hoose this gait, sir,—gien I may tak the leeberty to speir ?"

"We don't exactly keep open house. We wouldn't like to have any one with us who would count it poor fare. But still less would we like to exclude one of the Lord's friends. If that is a new thing, it ought to be an old one.—You believe in Jesus Christ—don't you, ma'am ?"

"I dinna ken whether I believe in him as ye wad ca' believin' or no—there 's sic a heap o' things broucht to the fore noo-a-days 'at I canna richtly say I un'erstan'. But as he dee'd for me, I wad dee for him. Raither nor say I didna ken him, I wad hing aside him. Peter an' a', I canna say less."

Mr. Bigg's eyes began to smart, and he turned away his head.

"Gien that 'll du wi' ye," Miss Horn went on, "an' ye mean no desertion o' the kirk o' my father an' his fathers afore him, I wad willin'ly partak wi' ye."

"You 'll be welcome, Miss Horn—as welcome as any of my own flock."

"Weel, noo, that I ca' Christi-an," said Miss

Horn, rising. "An' 'deed I cud wuss," she added, "'at in oor ain kirk we had mair opportunity, for ance i' the twalmonth 's no verra aften to tak up the thouchts 'at belang to the holy ord'nance."

The next day, after a powerful sermon from a man who, although in high esteem, was not for moral worth or heavenly insight to be compared with him whose place he took, they proceeded to the celebration of the Lord's supper, after the fashion of that portion of the church universal.

The communicants sat in several long pews facing the communion table, which was at the foot of the pulpit. After the reading of St. Paul's account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, accompanied by prayers and addresses, the deacons carried the bread to the people, handing a slice to the first in each pew; each person in turn broke off a portion, and handed what remained to the next: thus they divided it among themselves.

It so happened that, in moving up to the communion seats, Miss Forsyth and Miss Horn were the last to enter one of them, and Miss Horn, very needlessly insisting on her custom of having her more capable ear towards her friend, occupied the place next the passage.

The service had hardly commenced, when she caught sight of the face of the mad laird peeping in at the door, which was in the side of the building, near where she sat. Their eyes met. With a half-repentant, half-apologetic look, he crept in, and, apparently to get as near his protectress as he could, sat down in the entrance of an empty pew, 'ust opposite the one in which she was seated, on the other side of the narrow passage. His presence attracted little notice, for it was quite usual for individuals of the congregation who were not members of the church to linger on the outskirts of the company as spectators.

By the time the piece of bread reached Miss Horn from the other end, it was but a fragment. She broke it in two, and, reserving one part for herself, in place of handing the remnant to the deacon who stood ready to take it, stretched her arm across the passage, and gave it to Mr. Stewart, who had been watching the proceedings intently He received it from her hand, bent his head over it devoutly, and ate it, unconscious of the scandalized looks of the deacon, who knew nothing of the miserable object thus accepting rather than claiming a share in the common hope of men.

When the cup followed, the deacon was on the alert, ready to take it at once from the hands of Miss Horn. But as it left her lips she rose, grasping it in both hands, and with the dignity of a messenger of the Most High, before which the deacon drew back, bore it to the laird, and having made him drink the little that was left, yielded it to the conservator of holy privileges, with the words:

"Hoots, man! the puir body never had a taste o' the balm o' Gilead in a' 's persecutit life afore!"

The liberality of Mr. Bigg had not been lost upon her: freely she had received—freely she gave. What was good must, because it was good, be divided with her neighbour. It was a lawless act.

As soon as the benediction was spoken, the laird slipped away, but as he left the seat, Miss Horn heard him murmur—"Eh, the bonny man! the bonny man!" He could hardly have meant the deacon. He might have meant Mr. Bigg, who had concluded the observance with a simple and loving exhortation.

CHAPTER XVII.

MISS HORN AND THE PIPER.

WHEN Miss Horn bethought herself that night, in prospect of returning home the next day, that she had been twice in the company of the laird and had not even thought of asking him about Phemy, she reproached herself not a little; and it was with shame that she set out, immediately on her arrival, to tell Malcolm that she had seen him. No one at the House being able to inform her where he was at the moment, she went on to Duncan's cottage. There she found the piper, who could not tell where his boy was, but gave her a hearty welcome, and offered her a cup of tea, which, as it was now late in the afternoon, Miss Horn gladly accepted. As he bustled about to prepare it, refusing all assistance from his guest, he began to open his mind to her on a subject much in his thoughts—namely, Malcolm's inexplicable aversion to Mrs. Stewart.

"Ta nem of Stewart will pe a nople worrt, mem," he said.

"It's guid eneuch to ken a body by," answered Miss Horn.

"If ta poy will pe a Stewart," he went on, heedless of the indifference of her remark, "who'll pe knowing put he'll may pe of ta plood royal!"

"There didna leuk to be muckle royalty aboot auld John, honest man, wha cudna rule a wife, though he had but ane!" returned Miss Horn.

"If you 'll please, mem, ton't you 'll pe too sherp on ta poor man whose wife will not pe ta coot wife. If ta wife will pe ta paad wife, she will pe ta paad wife however, and ta poor man will pe hafing ta paad wife and ta paad plame of it too, and tat will pe more as 'll pe fair, mem."

"'Deed ye never said a truer word, Maister MacPhail!" assented Miss Horn. "It's a mercy 'at a lone wuman like me, wha has a maisterfu' temper o' her ain, an' no feelin's, was never putten to the temptation o' occkypeein' sic a perilous position. I doobt gien auld John had been merried upo' me, I micht hae putten on the wrang claes some mornin' mysel', an' may be had ill gettin' o' them aff again."

The old man was silent, and Miss Horn resumed the main subject of their conversation.

"But though he michtna objec' till a father 'at he wasna jist Hector or Golia' o' Gath," she said, "ye canna wonner 'at the yoong laad no carin' to hae sic a mither."

"And what would pe ta harm with ta mother? Will she not pe a coot woman, and a coot letty more to ta bargain?"

"Ye ken what fowk says till her guideship o' her son!"

"Yes; put tat will pe ta lies of ta peoples. Ta peoples wass always telling lies."

"Weel, allooin', it 's a peety ye sudna ken, supposin' him to be hers, hoo sma' fowk hauds the chance o' his bein' a Stewart, for a' that!"

"She 'll not pe comprestanding you," said Duncan, bewildered.

"He 's a wise son 'at kens his ain father!" remarked Miss Horn, with more point than originality. "The leddy never bore the best o' characters, as far 's my memory taks me,—an' that 's back afore John an' her was merried ony gate. Na, na; John Stewart never took a dwaum 'cause Ma'colm MacPhail was upo' the ro'd."

Miss Horn was sufficiently enigmatical; but her meaning had at length, more through his own

reflection than her exposition, dawned upon Duncan. He leaped up with a Gaelic explosion of concentrated force, and cried,

"Ta woman is not pe no mothers to Tuncan's poy!"

"Huly, huly, Mr. MacPhail!" interposed Miss Horn, with good-natured revenge; "it may be naething but fowk's lees, ye ken."

"Ta woman tat ta peoples will pe telling lies of her, wass not pe ta mother of her poy Malcolm. Why tidn't ta poy tell her ta why tat he wouldn't pe hafing her?"

"Ye wadna hae him spread an ill report o' his ain mither?"

"Put she'll not pe his mother, and you'll not pelieve it, mem."

"Ye canna priv that—you nor him aither."

"It will pe more as would kill her poy to haf a woman like tat to ta mother of him."

"It wad be near han' as ill 's haein' her for a wife," assented Miss Horn; "but no freely (*quite*)," she added.

The old man sought the door, as if for a breath of air; but as he went, he blundered, and felt about as if he had just been struck blind: ordinarily he

walked, in his own house at least, as if he saw every inch of the way. Presently he returned and resumed his seat.

"Was the bairn laid mither-nakit intil yer han's, Maister MacPhail?" asked Miss Horn, who had been meditating.

"Och! no; he wass his clo'es on," answered Duncan.

"Hae ye ony o' them left?" she asked again.

"Inteet not," answered Duncan. "Yes, inteet not."

"Ye lay at the Salmon, didna ye?"

"Yes, mem, and they wass coot to her."

"Wha drest the bairn till ye?"

"Och! she 'll trest him herself," said Duncan, still jealous of the women who had nursed the child.

"But no aye?" suggested Miss Horn.

"Mistress Partan will pe toing a coot teal of tressing him, sometimes. Mistress Partan is a coot 'oman when she 'll pe coot—fery coot when she 'll pe coot."

Here Malcolm entered, and Miss Horn told him what she had seen of the laird, and gathered concerning him.

"That luiks ill for Phemy," remarked Malcolm, when she had described his forlorn condition. "She canna be wi' 'im, or he wadna be like that. Hae ye onything by w'y o' coonsel, mem?"

"I wad coonsel a word wi' the laird himsel'—gien't be to be gotten. He mayna ken what's happent her, but he may tell ye the last he saw o' her, an' that maun be mair nor ye ken."

"He 's taen sic a doobt o' me 'at I 'm feart it 'll be hard to come at him, an' still harder to come at speech o' 'im, for whan he 's frichtit he can hardly muv 's jawbane—no to say speyk. I maun try though and du my best. Ye think he 's lurkin' aboot Fife Hoose, div ye, mem?"

"He 's been seen there-awa' this while—aff an' on.'

"Weel, I s' jist gang an' put on my fisher-claes, an' set oot at ance. I maun haud ower to Scaurnose first, though, to lat them ken 'at he 's been gotten sicht o'. It 'll be but sma' comfort, I doobt."

"Malcolm, my son," interjected Duncan, who had been watching for the conversation to afford him an opening, "if you 'll pe meeting any one will caal you ta son of tat woman, gif him a coot plow in ta face, for you 'll pe no son of hers, efen if

she 'll proof it—no more as herself. If you 'll pe her son, old Tuncan will pe tisown you for efer, and efermore, amen."

"What's broucht you to this, daddie?" asked Malcolm, who, ill as he liked the least allusion to the matter, could not help feeling curious, and indeed almost amused.

"Nefer you mind. Miss Horn will pe hafing coot reasons tat Mistress Stewart 'ill not can pe your mother."

Malcolm turned to Miss Horn.

"I 've said naething to Maister MacPhail but what I 've said mair nor ance to yersel', laddie," she replied to the eager questioning of his eyes. "Gang yer wa's. The trowth maun cow the lee i' the lang rin. Aff wi' ye to Blew Peter!"

When Malcolm reached Scaurnose he found Phemy's parents in a sad state. Joseph had returned that morning from a fruitless search in a fresh direction, and reiterated disappointment seemed to have at length overcome Annie's endurance, for she had taken to her bed. Joseph was sitting before the fire on a three-legged stool rocking himself to and fro in a dull agony. When he heard Malcolm's voice, he jumped to his feet, and

a flash of hope shot from his eyes; but when he had heard all, he sat down again without a word, and began rocking himself as before.

Mrs. Mair was lying in the darkened closet, where, the door being partly open, she had been listening with all her might, and was now weeping afresh. Joseph was the first to speak: still rocking himself with hopeless oscillation, he said, in a strange muffled tone which seemed to come from somewhere else—

"Gien I kent she was weel deid I wadna care. It's no like a father to be sittin' here, but whaur 'll I gang neist? The wife thinks I micht be duin' something: I kenna what to du. This last news is waur nor nane. I hae maist nae faith left. Ma'colm, man!"—and with a bitter cry he started to his feet—"I 'maist dinna believe there's a God ava'. It disna luik like it—dis 't noo?"

There came an answering cry from the closet; Annie rushed out, half-undressed, and threw her arms about her husband.

"Joseph! Joseph!" she said, in a voice hard with agony—almost more dreadful than a scream —"gien ye speyk like that, ye 'll drive me mad. Lat the lassie gang, but lea' me my God!"

Joseph pushed her gently away, turned from her, fell on his knees, and moaned out—

"O God, gien thoo has her, we s' neither greit nor grum'le; but dinna tak the faith frae 's."

He remained on his knees, silent, with his head against the chimney-jamb. His wife crept away to her closet.

"Peter," said Malcolm, "I'm gaein' aff the nicht to luik for the laird, and see gien he can tell 's onything aboot her: wadna ye better come wi' me?"

To the heart of the father it was as the hope of the resurrection to the world. The same moment he was on his feet and taking down his bonnet; the next he disappeared in the closet, and Malcolm heard the tinkling of the money in the lidless teapot; then out he came with a tear on his face and a glimmer in his eyes.

The sun was down, and a bone-piercing chill, incarnate in the vague mist that haunted the ground, assailed them as they left the cottage. The sea moaned drearily. A smoke seemed to ascend from the horizon half-way to the zenith, something too thin for cloud, too black for vapour; above that the stars were beginning to

shine. Joseph shivered and struck his hands against his shoulders.

"Care 's cauldrife," he said, and strode on.

Almost in silence they walked together to the county town, put up at a little inn near the river, and at once began to make inquiries. Not a few persons had seen the laird at different times, but none knew where he slept or chiefly haunted. There was nothing for it but to set out in the morning, and stray hither and thither, on the chance of somewhere finding him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CUTTLE-FISH AND THE CRAB.

ALTHOUGH the better portion of the original assembly had forsaken the Baillies' Barn, there was still a regular gathering in it as before, and if possible even a greater manifestation of zeal for the conversion of sinners. True, it might not be clear to an outsider that they always made a difference between being converted and joining their company, so ready were they to mix up the two in their utterances; and the results of what they counted conversion were sometimes such as the opponents of their proceedings would have had them: the arrogant became yet more arrogant, and the greedy more greedy; the tongues of the talkative went yet faster, and the gad-abouts were yet seldomer at home; while there was such a superabundance of private judgment that it overflowed the cisterns of their own concerns, and invaded the walled gardens of other people's motives; yet, notwithstanding, the good people got good, if the other sort got evil; for the meek shall inherit the earth, even when the priest ascends the throne of

Augustus. No worst thing ever done in the name of Christianity, no vilest corruption of the Church, can destroy the eternal fact that the core of it is the heart of Jesus. Branches innumerable may have to be lopped off and cast into the fire, yet the word *I am the vine* remaineth.

The demagogues had gloried in the expulsion of such men as Jeames Gentle and Blue Peter, and were soon rejoiced by the return of Bow-o'-meal—after a season of backsliding to the flesh-pots of Egypt, as they called the services of the parish church—to the bosom of the Barn, where he soon was again one of the chief amongst them. Meantime the circles of their emanating influence continued to spread, until at length they reached the lower classes of the upper town, of whom a few began to go to the Barn. Amongst them, for reasons best known to herself, though they might be surmised by such as really knew her, was Mrs. Catanach. I do not know that she ever professed repentance and conversion, but for a time she attended pretty often. Possibly business considerations had something to do with it Assuredly the young preacher, though he still continued to exhort, did so with failing strength, and it was plain to see that he was going rapidly: the

exercise of the second of her twin callings might be required. She could not, however, have been drawn by any large expectations as to the honorarium. Still, she would gain what she prized even more—a position for the moment at the heart of affairs, with its excelling chances of hearing and overhearing. Never had lover of old books half the delight in fitting together a rare volume from scattered portions picked up in his travels, that Mrs. Catanach found in vitalizing stray remarks, arranging odds and ends of news, and cementing the many fragments, with the help of the babblings of gossip, into a plausible whole; intellectually considered, her special pursuit was inasmuch the nobler as the faculties it brought into exercise were more delicate and various; and if her devotion to the minutiæ of biography had no high end in view, it never caused her to lose sight of what ends she had, by involving her in opinions, prejudices, or disputes: however she might break out at times, her general policy was to avoid quarrelling. There was a strong natural antagonism between her and the Partaness, but she had never shown the least dislike to her, and that although Mrs. Findlay had never lost an opportunity of manifesting hers to the midwife. Indeed, having gained

a pretext by her ministrations to Lizzy when overcome by the suggestions of the dog-sermon, Mrs. Catanach had assayed an approach to her mother, and not without success. After the discovery of the physical cause of Lizzy's ailment, however, Mrs. Findlay had sought, by might of rude resolve, to break loose from the encroaching acquaintanceship, but had found, as yet, that the hard-shelled crab was not a match for the glutinous cuttlefish.

On the evening of the Sunday following the events related in the last chapter, Mrs. Catanach had, not without difficulty, persuaded Mrs. Findlay to accompany her to the Baillies' Barn, with the promise of a wonderful sermon from a new preacher —a ploughman on an inland farm. That she had an object in desiring her company that night, may seem probable from the conversation which arose as they plodded their way thither along the sands.

"I h'ard a queer tale aboot Meg Horn at Duff Harbour the ither day," said the midwife, speaking thus disrespectfully both to ease her own heart and to call forth the feelings of her companion, who also, she knew, disliked Miss Horn.

"Ay! An' what micht that be?"

"But she's maybe a freen' o' yours, Mistress Find-

lay? Some fowk likes her, though I canna say I'm ane o' them."

"Freen' o' mine!" exclaimed the Partaness. "We gree like twa bills (*bulls*) i' the same park!"

"I wadna wonner!—for they tellt me 'at saw her fechtin' i' the High Street wi' a muckle loon, near-han' as big 's hersel'! an' haith, but Meg had the best o' 't, an' dang him intil the gutter, an' maist fellt him! An' that 's Meg Horn!"

"She had been at the drink! But I never h'ard it laid till her afore."

"Didna ye than? Weel, I'm no sayin' onything—that 's what I h'ard."

"Ow, it 's like eneuch! She was bulliraggin' at me nae langer ago nor thestreen; but I doobt I sent her awa' wi' a flech (*flea*) in her lug!"

"Whaten a craw had she to pluck wi' *you*, no?"

"Ow, fegs! ye wad hae ta'en her for a thief-catcher, and me for the thief! She wad threpe (*insist*) 'at I bude to hae keepit some o' the duds 'at happit Ma'colm MacPhail, the reprobat, whan first he cam to the Seaton—a puir scraichin' brat, as reid 's a bilet lobster. Wae 's me 'at ever he was creatit! It jist drives me horn-daft to think 'at ever he got the breist o' me. 'At *he* sud sair (*serve*) me sae! But

I s' hae a grip o' 'im yet, or my name 's no—what they ca' me."

"It 's the w'y o' the warl', Mistress Findlay. What cud ye expec' o' ane born in sin an' broucht furth in ineequity?"—a stock phrase of Mrs. Catanach's, glancing at her profession, and embracing nearly the whole of her belief.

"It 's a true word. The mair 's the peety he sud hae hed the milk o' an honest wuman upo' the tap o' that!"

"But what cud the auld runt be efter? What was *her* business wi' 't? *She* never did onything for the bairn."

"Na, no *she!* She never had the chance, guid or ill.—Ow! doobtless it wad be anent what they ca' the eedentryfeein' o' 'im to the leddy o' Gersefell. *She* had sent her. She micht hae waled (*chosen*) a mair welcome messenger, an' sent her a better eeran'! But she made little o' me."

"*Ye* had naething o' the kin', I s' wad."

"Never a threid. There *was* a twal-hunner shift upo' the bairn, rowt roon 'im like deid-claes:—gien 't had been but the Lord's wull! It gart me wonner at the time, for that wasna hoo a bairn 'at had been caret for sud be cled."

"Was there name or mark upo' 't?" asked cuttle-fish.

"Nane; there was but the place whaur the reid ingrain had been pykit oot," answered crab.

"An' what cam o' the shift?"

"Ow, I jist made it doon for a bit sark to the bairn whan he grew to be rinnin' aboot. 'At ever I sud hae ta'en steik in claith for sic a deil's buckie! To *me* 'at was a mither till 'im! The Lord haud me ohn gane mad whan I think o' 't!"

"An' syne for Lizzy!—" began Mrs. Catanach, prefacing fresh remark.

But at her name, the mother flew into such a rage that, fearful of scandal, seeing it was the Sabbath and they were on their way to public worship, her companion would have exerted all her powers of oiliest persuasion to appease her. But if there was one thing Mrs. Catanach did not understand, it was the heart of a mother.

"Hoots, Mistress Findlay! Fowk'll hear ye. Haud yer tongue, I beg. She may dee i' the strae for me. I s' never put han' to the savin' o' her, or her bairn aither," said the midwife, thinking thus to pacify her.

Then, like the eruption following mere volcanic

unrest, out brake the sore-hearted woman's wrath. And now at length the crustacean was too much for the mollusk. She raved and scolded and abused Mrs. Catanach, till at last she was driven to that final resource—the airs of an injured woman. She turned and walked back to the upper town, while Mrs. Findlay went on to take what share she might in the worship of the congregation.

Mrs. Mair had that evening gone once more to the Baillies' Barn in her husband's absence; for the words of unbelief he had uttered in the Job-like agony of his soul, had haunted the heart of his spouse, until she too felt as if she could hardly believe in a God. Few know what a poor thing their faith is till the trial comes. And in the weakness consequent on protracted suffering, she had begun to fancy that the loss of Phemy was a punishment upon them for deserting the conventicle. Also the schoolmaster was under an interdict, and that looked like a judgment too! She *must* find some prop for the faith that was now shaking like a reed in the wind. So to the Baillies' Barn she had gone.

The tempest which had convulsed Mrs. Findlay's atmosphere, had swept its vapours with it as it passed away; and when she entered the cavern, it

was with an unwonted inclination to be friendly all round. As fate would have it, she unwittingly took her place by Mrs. Mair, whom she had not seen since she gave Lizzy shelter. When she discovered who her neighbour was, she started away and stared; but she had had enough of quarrelling for the evening, and besides had not had time to bar her door against the angel Pity, who suddenly stepped across the threshold of her heart with the sight of Mrs. Mair's pale thin cheeks and tear-reddened eyes. As suddenly, however, an indwelling demon of her own house, whose name was Envy, arose from the ashes of her hearth to meet the white-robed visitant: Phemy, poor little harmless thing, was safe enough! who would harm a hair of her? but Lizzy! And this woman had taken in the fugitive from honest chastisement! She would yet have sought another seat, but the congregation rose to sing; and her neighbour's offer of the use in common of her psalm-book, was enough to quiet for the moment the gaseous brain of the turbulent woman. She accepted the kindness, and, the singing over, did not refuse to look on the same holy page with her daughter's friend, while the ploughman read, with fitting simplicity, the parable of the Prodigal Son. It touched some-

thing in both, but a different something in each. Strange to say, neither applied it to her own case, but each to her neighbour's. As the reader uttered the words "was lost and is found" and ceased, each turned to the other with a whisper. Mrs. Mair persisted in hers; and the other, which was odd enough, yielded and listened.

"Wad the tale haud wi' lassies as weel 's laddies, Mistress Findlay, div ye think?" said Mrs. Mair.

"Ow, surely!" was the response; "it maun du that. There 's no respec' o' persons wi' *him.* There 's no a doobt but yer Phemy 'ill come hame to ye safe an' soon'."

"I was thinkin' aboot Lizzy," said the other, a little astonished; and then the prayer began, and they had to be silent.

The sermon of the ploughman was both dull and sensible,—an excellent variety where few of the sermons were either; but it made little impression on Mrs. Findlay or Mrs. Mair.

As they left the cave together in the crowd of issuing worshippers, Mrs. Mair whispered again:

"I wad invete ye ower, but ye wad be wantin' Lizzy hame, an' I can ill spare the comfort o' her the noo," she said, with the cunning of a dove.

"An' what comes o' *me?*" rejoined Mrs. Findlay, her claws out in a moment where her personal consequence was touched.

"Ye wadna surely tak her frae me a' at ance!" pleaded Mrs. Mair. "Ye micht lat her bide—jist till Phemy comes hame; an' syne——"

But there she broke down; and the tempest of sobs that followed quite overcame the heart of Mrs. Findlay. She was, in truth, a woman like another; only being of the crustacean order, she had not yet swallowed her skeleton, as all of us have to do more or less, sooner or later, the idea of that scaffolding being that it should be out of sight. With the best commonplaces at her command she sought to comfort her companion; walked with her to the foot of the red path; found her much more to her mind than Mrs. Catanach; seemed inclined to go with her all the way, but suddenly stopped, bade her good-night, and left her.

CHAPTER XIX.

MISS HORN AND LORD LOSSIE.

NOTWITHSTANDING the quarrel, Mrs. Catanach did not return without having gained something: she had learned that Miss Horn had been foiled in what she had no doubt was an attempt to obtain proof that Malcolm was not the son of Mrs. Stewart. The discovery was a grateful one; for who could have told but there might be something in existence to connect him with another origin than she and Mrs. Stewart would assign him?

The next day the marquis returned. Almost his first word was the desire that Malcolm should be sent to him. But nobody knew more than that he was missing; whereupon he sent for Duncan. The old man explained his boy's absence, and as soon as he was dismissed, took his way to the town, and called upon Miss Horn. In half an hour, the good lady started on foot for Duff Harbour. It was already growing dark; but there was one feeling Miss Horn had certainly been created without, and that was *fear*.

As she approached her destination, tramping

eagerly along, in a half-cloudy, half star-lit night, with a damp east wind blowing cold from the German Ocean, she was startled by the swift rush of something dark across the road before her. It came out of a small wood on the left towards the sea, and bolted through a hedge on the right.

"Is that you, laird?" she cried; but there came no answer.

She walked straight to the house of her lawyer-friend, and, after an hour's rest, the same night set out again for Portlossie, which she reached in safety by her bed-time.

Lord Lossie was very accessible. Like Shakspere's Prince Hal, he was so much interested in the varieties of the outcome of human character, that he would not willingly lose a chance of seeing "more man." If the individual proved a bore, he would get rid of him without remorse; if amusing, he would contrive to prolong the interview. There was a great deal of undeveloped humanity somewhere in his lordship, one of whose indications was this spectacular interest in his kind. As to their by-gone history, how they fared out of his sight, or what might become of them, he never gave a thought to anything of the kind—never felt the pull of one

of the bonds of brotherhood, laughed at them the moment they were gone, or, if a woman's story had touched him, wiped his eyes with an oath, and thought himself too good a fellow for this world.

Since his retirement from the more indolent life of the metropolis to the quieter and more active pursuits of the country, his character had bettered a little—inasmuch as it was a shade more accessible to spiritual influences; the hard soil had in a few places cracked a hair's-breadth, and lay thus far open to the search of those sun-rays which, when they find the human germ, that is, the conscience, straightway begin to sting it into life. To this betterment the company of his daughter had chiefly contributed; for, if she was little more developed in the right direction than himself, she was far less developed in the wrong, and the play of affection between them was the divinest influence that could as yet be brought to bear upon either; but certain circumstances of late occurrence had had a share in it, occasioning a revival of old memories which had a considerably sobering effect upon him.

As he sat at breakfast, about eleven o'clock on the morning after his return, one of his English servants entered with the message that a person, calling her-

self Miss Horn, and refusing to explain her business, desired to see his lordship for a few minutes.

"Who is she?" asked the marquis.

The man did not know.

"What is she like?"

"An odd-looking old lady, my lord, and very oddly dressed."

"Show her into the next room. I shall be with her directly."

Finishing his cup of coffee and pea-fowl's egg with deliberation, while he tried his best to recall in what connection he could have heard the name before, the marquis at length sauntered into the morning room in his dressing-gown, with the *Times* of the day before yesterday, just arrived, in his hand. There stood his visitor waiting for him, such as my reader knows her, black and gaunt and grim, in a bay window, whose light almost surrounded her, so that there was scarcely a shadow about her, and yet to the eyes of the marquis she seemed wrapped in shadows. Mysterious as some sybil, whose being held secrets the first whisper of which had turned her old, but made her immortal, she towered before him, with her eyes fixed upon him, and neither spoke nor moved.

"To what am I indebted——?" began his lordship; but Miss Horn speedily interrupted his courtesy.

"Own to nae debt, my lord, till ye ken what it 's for," she said, without a tone or inflection to indicate a pleasantry.

"Good!" returned his lordship, and waited with a smile. She promised amusement, and he was ready for it—but it hardly came.

"Ken ye that han' o' wreet, my lord?" she inquired, sternly advancing a step, and holding out a scrap of paper at arm's length, as if presenting a pistol.

The marquis took it. In his countenance curiosity had mingled with the expectation. He glanced at it. A shadow swept over his face but vanished instantly: the mask of impervious non-expression which a man of his breeding always knows how to assume, was already on his visage.

"Where did you get this?" he said quietly, with just the slightest catch in his voice.

"I got it, my lord, whaur there 's mair like it."

"Show me them."

"I hae shawn ye plenty for a swatch (*pattern*), my lord."

"You refuse?" said the marquis; and the tone of the question was like the first cold puff that indicates a change of weather.

"I div, my lord," she answered imperturbably.

"If they are not my property, why do you bring me this?"

"Are they your property, my lord?"

"This is my handwriting."

"Ye alloo that?"

"Certainly, my good woman. You did not expect me to deny it?"

"God forbid, my lord! But will ye uphaud yersel' the lawfu' heir to the deceased? It lies 'atween yer lordship an' mysel'—i' the meantime."

He sat down, holding the scrap of paper between his finger and thumb.

"I will buy them of you," he said coolly, after a moment's thought, and as he spoke he looked keenly at her.

The form of reply which first arose in Miss Horn's indignant soul never reached her lips.

"It's no my trade," she answered, with the coldness of suppressed wrath. "I dinna deal in sic waurs."

"What do you deal in then?" asked the marquis.

"In trouth an' fair play, my lord," she answered, and was again silent.

So was the marquis for some moments, but was the first to resume.

"If you think the papers to which you refer of the least value, allow me to tell you it is an entire mistake."

"There was ane thoucht them o' vailue," replied Miss Horn—and her voice trembled a little, but she hemmed away her emotion—"—for a time at least, my lord; an' for her sake they're o' vailue to me, be they what they may to yer lordship. But wha can tell? Scots law may put life intill them yet, an' gie them a vailue to somebody forbye me."

"What I mean, my good woman, is, that if you think the possession of those papers gives you any hold over me which you can turn to your advantage, you are mistaken."

"Guid forgie ye, my lord! *My* advantage! I thoucht yer lordship had been mair o' a gentleman by this time, or I wad hae sent a lawyer till ye, in place o' comin' mysel'."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It's plain ye cudna hae been muckle o' a gentleman ance, my lord; an' it seems ye're no muckle

mair o' ane yet, for a' ye maun hae come throu' i' the meantime."

"I trust you have discovered nothing in those letters to afford ground for such a harsh judgment," said the marquis seriously.

"Na, no a word i' them, but the mair oot o' them. Ye winna threep upo' me 'at a man wha lea's a wuman, lat alane his wife—or ane 'at he ca's his wife—to a' the pains o' a mither, an' a' the penalties o' an oonmerried ane, ohn ever speirt hoo she wan throu' them, preserves the richt he was born till o' bein' coontit a gentleman? Ony gait, a maiden wuman like mysel', wha *has* nae feelin's, will *not* alloo him the teetle. Guid forbid it!"

"You are plain-spoken."

"I 'm plain-made, my lord. I ken guid frae ill, an' little forbye, but aye fand that eneuch to sare my turn. Aither thae letters o' yer lordship's are ilk ane o' them a lee, or ye desertit yer wife an' bairn——"

"Alas!" interrupted the marquis, with some emotion—"she deserted me—and took the child with her!"

"Wha ever daurt sic a lee upo' my Grizel?" shouted Miss Horn, clenching and shaking her bony fist at the world in general. "It was but a fortnicht or three

weeks, as near as I can judge, efter the birth o' your bairn, that Grizel Cam'ell——"

"Were you with her then?" again interrupted the marquis, in a tone of sorrowful interest.

"No, my lord, I was not. Gien I had been, I wadna be upo' sic an eeran' this day. For nigh twenty lang years 'at her an' me keepit hoose thegither, till she dee'd i' my airms, never a day was she oot o' my sicht, or ance——"

The marquis leaped rather than started to his feet, exclaiming,—

"What in the name of God do you mean, woman?"

"I kenna what *ye* mean, my lord. I ken 'at I'm but tellin' ye the trouth whan I tell ye 'at Grizel Cam'ell, up to that day, an' that's little ower sax month sin' syne,——"

"Good God!" cried the marquis; "and here have I——!—Woman! are you speaking the truth?—If——," he added threateningly, and paused.

"Leein' 's what I never cud bide, my lord, an' I'm no likly to tak till 't at my age, wi' the lang to-come afore me."

The marquis strode several times up and down the floor.

"I'll give you a thousand pounds for those letters," he said, suddenly stopping in front of Miss Horn.

"They're o' nae sic worth, my lord—I hae yer ain word for 't. But I carena the leg o' a spin-maggie (*daddy-longlegs*)! Pairt wi' them I will not, 'cep' to him 'at pruves himsel' the richtfu' heir to them."

"A husband inherits from his wife."

"Or maybe her son micht claim first—I dinna ken. But there 's lawyers, my lord, to redd the doobt."

"Her son! You don't mean——?"

"I div mean Ma'colm MacPhail, my lord."

"God in heaven!"

"His name 's mair i' yer mou' nor i' yer hert, I'm doobtin', my lord! Ye a' cry oot upo' *him*—the men o' ye—whan ye're in ony tribble, or want to gar women believe ye! But I'm thinkin' he peys but little heed to sic prayers."

Thus Miss Horn; but Lord Lossie was striding up and down the room, heedless of her remarks, his eyes on the ground, his arms straight by his sides, and his hands clenched.

"Can you prove what you say?" he asked at length, half stopping, and casting an almost wild look at Miss Horn, then resuming his hurried walk. His

voice sounded hollow, as if sent from the heart of a gulf of pain.

"No, my lord," answered Miss Horn.

"Then what the devil," roared the marquis, "do you mean by coming to me with such a cock-and-bull story?"

"There's naither cock-craw nor bill-rair intill 't my lord. I come to you wi' 't i' the houp ye'll help to redd (*clear*) it up, for I dinna weel ken what we can du wantin' ye. There's but ane kens a' the trouth o' 't, an' she's the awfu'est leear oot o' purgatory—no 'at I believe in purgatory, but it's the langer an' lichter word to mak' use o'."

"Who is she?"

"By name she's Bauby Cat'nach, an' by natur' she's what I tell ye—an' gien I had her 'atween my twa een, it's what I wad say to the face o' her."

"It can't be Mac Phail! Mrs. Stewart says he is *her* son, and the woman Catanach is her chief witness in support of the claim."

"The deevil has a better to the twa o' them, my lord, as they'll ken some day. *His* claim 'ill want nae supportin'. Dinna ye believe a word Mistress Stewart or Bauby Catanach aither wad say to ye.—Gien he be Mistress Stewart's, wha was his father?"

"You think he resembles my late brother: he has a look of him, I confess."

"He has, my lord. But onybody 'at kent the mither o' 'm, as you an' me did, my lord, wad see anither lik'ness as weel."

"I grant nothing."

"Ye grant Grizel Cam'ell yer wife, my lord, whan ye own to that wreet. Gien 't war naething but a written promise an' a bairn to follow, it wad be merriage eneuch i' this cuintry, though it mayna be in cuintries no sae ceevileest."

"But all that is nothing as to the child. Why do you fix on this young fellow? You say you can't prove it."

"But *ye* cud, my lord, gien ye war as set upo' justice as I am. Gien ye winna muv i' the maitter, we s' manage to hirple (*go halting*) throu' wantin' ye, though, wi' the Lord's help."

The marquis, who had all this time continued his walk up and down the floor, stood still, raised his head as if about to speak, dropped it again on his chest, strode to the other window, turned, strode back, and said,—

"This is a very serious matter."

"It's a' that, my lord," replied Miss Horn.

"You must give me a little time to turn it over," said the marquis.

"Isna twenty year time eneuch, my lord?" rejoined Miss Horn.

"I swear to you that till this moment I believed her twenty years in her grave. My brother sent me word that she died in childbed, and the child with her. I was then at Brussels with the Duke."

Miss Horn made three great strides, caught the marquis's hand in both hers, and said,—

"I praise God ye're an honest man, my lord."

"I hope so," said the marquis, and seized the advantage:—"You 'll hold your tongue about this?" he added, half inquiring, half requesting.

"As lang as I see rizzon, my lord, nae langer," answered Miss Horn, dropping his hand. "Richt maun be dune."

"Yes—if you can tell what right is, and avoid wrong to others."

"Richt 's richt, my lord," persisted Miss Horn. "I 'll hae nae modifi-qualifications!"

His lordship once more began to walk up and down the room, every now and then taking a stolen glance at Miss Horn, a glance of uneasy anxious questioning. She stood rigid—a very Lot's wife of

immobility, her eyes on the ground, waiting what he would say next.

"I wish I knew whether I could trust her," he said at length, as if talking aloud to himself.

Miss Horn took no notice.

"Why don't you speak, woman?" cried the marquis with irritation. How he hated perplexity!

"Ye speired nae queston, my lord; an' gien ye had, my word has ower little weicht to answer wi'."

"Can I trust you, woman—I want to know," said his lordship angrily.

"No far'er, my lord, nor to du what I think 's richt."

"I want to be certain that you will do nothing with those letters until you hear from me?" said the marquis, heedless of her reply.

"I 'll du naething afore the morn. Far'er nor that I winna pledge mysel'," answered Miss Horn, and with the words moved towards the door.

"Hadn't you better take this with you?" said the marquis, offering the little note, which he had carried all the time between his finger and thumb.

"There 's nae occasion. I hae plenty wantin' that. Only dinna lea' 't lyin' aboot."

"There 's small danger of that," said the marquis, and rang the bell.

The moment she was out of the way, he went up to his own room, and, flinging the door to, sat down at the table, and laid his arms and head upon it. The acrid vapour of tears that should have been wept long since, rose to his eyes: he dashed his hand across them, as if ashamed that he was not even yet out of sight of the kingdom of heaven. His own handwriting, of a period when all former sins and defilements seemed about to be burned clean from his soul by the fire of an honest and virtuous love, had moved him; for genuine had been his affection for the girl who had risked and lost so much for him. It was with no evil intent, for her influence had rendered him for the time incapable of playing her false, but in part from reasons of prudence, as he persuaded himself, for both their sakes, and in part led astray by the zest which minds of a certain cast derive from the secrecy of pleasure, that he had persuaded her to the unequal yoking of honesty and secrecy. But, suddenly called away and sent by the Prince on a private mission, soon after their marriage, and before there was any special reason to apprehend consequences that must lead to discovery, he had, in the difficulties of the case and the hope of a speedy return,

left her without any arrangement for correspondence; and all he had ever heard of her more was from his brother, then the marquis—a cynical account of the discovery of her condition, followed almost immediately by a circumstantial one of her death and that of her infant. He was deeply stung; and the thought of her sufferings in the false position where his selfishness had placed her, haunted him for a time beyond his endurance—for of all things he hated suffering, and of all sufferings remorse is the worst. Hence, where a wiser man might have repented, he rushed into dissipation, whose scorching wind swept away not only the healing dews of his sorrow, but the tender buds of new life that had begun to mottle the withering tree of his nature. The desire after better things which had, under his wife's genial influence, begun to pass into effort, not only vanished utterly in the shameless round of evil distraction, but its memory became a mockery to the cynical spirit that arose behind the vanishing angel of repentance; and he was soon in the condition of the man from whom the exorcised demon had gone but to find his seven worse companions.

Reduced at length to straits—almost to want, he had married the mother of Florimel, to whom for

a time he endeavoured to conduct himself in some measure like a gentleman. For this he had been rewarded by a decrease in the rate of his spiritual submergence, but his bedraggled nature could no longer walk without treading on its own plumes; and the poor lady who had bartered herself for a lofty alliance, speedily found her mistake a sad one and her life uninteresting, took to repining and tears, alienated her husband utterly, and died of a sorrow almost too selfish to afford even a suggestion of purifying efficacy. But Florimel had not inherited immediately from her mother, so far as disposition was concerned; in these latter days she had grown very dear to him, and his love had once more turned his face a little towards the path of righteousness. Ah! when would he move one step to set his feet in it?

And now, after his whirlwind harvest of evil knowledge, bitter disappointment, and fading passion, in the gathering mists of gray hopelessness, and the far worse mephitic air of indifference, he had come all of a sudden upon the ghastly discovery that, while overwhelmed with remorse for the vanished past, the present and the future had been calling him, but had now also—that present and that future

—glided from him, and folded their wings of gloom in the land of shadows. All the fierce time he might have been blessedly growing better, instead of heaping sin upon sin until the weight was too heavy for repentance; for, while he had been bemoaning a dead wife, that wife had been loving a renegade husband! And the blame of it all he did not fail to cast upon that Providence in which until now he had professed not to believe: such faith as he was yet capable of, awoke in the form of resentment! He judged himself hardly done by; and the few admonitory sermons he had happened to hear, especially that in the cave about the dogs going round the walls of the New Jerusalem, returned upon him, not as warnings, but as old threats now rapidly approaching fulfilment.

Lovely still peered the dim face of his girl wife upon him, through the dusty lattice of his memory; and a mighty corroboration of Malcolm's asserted birth lay in the look upon his face as he hurried aghast from the hermit's cell; for not on his first had the marquis seen that look and in those very circumstances! And the youth was one to be proud of—one among a million! But there were other and terrible considerations.

Incapable as he naturally was of doing justice to a woman of Miss Horn's inflexibility in right, he could yet more than surmise the absoluteness of that inflexibility—partly because it was hostile to himself, and he was in the mood to believe in opposition and harshness, and deny—not providence but goodness. Convenient half-measures would, he more than feared, find no favour with her. But she had declared her inability to prove Malcolm his son without the testimony of Mrs. Catanach, and the latter was even now representing him as the son of Mrs. Stewart! That Mrs. Catanach at the same time could not be ignorant of what had become of the child born to him, he was all but certain; for, on that night when Malcolm and he found her in the wizard's chamber, had she not proved her strange story—of having been carried to that very room blindfolded, and, after sole attendance on the birth of a child, whose mother's features, even in her worst pains, she had not once seen, in like manner carried away again,—had she not proved the story true by handing him the ring she had drawn from the lady's finger, and sewn, for the sake of future identification, into the lower edge of one of the bed-curtains—which ring was a diamond he had given his wife from his

own finger when they parted? She probably believed the lady to have been Mrs. Stewart, and the late marquis the father of the child. Should he see Mrs. Catanach? And what then?

He found no difficulty in divining the reasons which must have induced his brother to provide for the secret accouchement of his wife in the wizard's chamber, and for the abduction of the child—if indeed his existence was not owing to Mrs. Catanach's love of intrigue. The elder had judged the younger brother unlikely to live long, and had expected his own daughter to succeed himself. But now the younger might any day marry the governess, and legalize the child; and the elder had therefore secured the disappearance of the latter, and the belief of his brother in the death of both.

Lord Lossie was roused from his reverie by a tap at the door, which he knew for Malcolm's, and answered with admission.

When he entered, his master saw that a change had passed upon him, and for a moment believed Miss Horn had already broken faith with him and found communication with Malcolm. He was soon satisfied of the contrary, however, but would have found it hard indeed to understand, had it been re-

presented to him, that the contentment, almost elation, of the youth's countenance had its source in the conviction that he was not the son of Mrs. Stewart.

"So here you are at last!" said the marquis.

"Ay, my lord?"

"Did you find Stewart?"

"Ay did we at last, my lord; but we made naething by 't, for he kent noucht aboot the lassie, an 'maist lost his wuts at the news."

"No great loss, that!" said the marquis. "Go and send Stoat here."

"Is there ony hurry aboot Sto't, my lord?" asked Malcolm, hesitating. "I had a word to say to yer lordship mysel'."

"Make haste then."

"I 'm some fain to gang back to the fishin', my lord," said Malcolm. "This is ower easy a life for me. The deil wins in for the liftin' o' the sneck Forbye, my lord, a life wi'oot aither danger or wark 's some wersh-like (*insipid*); it wants saut, my lord. But a' that 's naither here nor there, I ken, sae lang 's ye want me oot o' the hoose, my lord."

"Who told you I wanted you out of the house? By Jove! I should have made shorter work of it. What put that in your head? Why should I?"

"Gien yer lordship kens nane, sma' occasion hae I to haud a rizzon to yer han'. I thoucht—but the thoucht itsel 's impidence."

"You young fool! You thought, because I came upon you as I did in the garret the other night—Bah!—You damned ape! As if I could not trust—! Pshaw!"

For the moment Malcolm forgot how angry his master had certainly been, although, for Florimel's sake doubtless, he had restrained himself; and fancied that, in the faint light of the one candle, he had seen little to annoy him, and had taken the storm and its results, which were indeed the sole reason, as a sufficient one for their being alone together. Everything seemed about to come right again. But his master remained silent.

"I houp my leddy 's weel," ventured Malcolm at length.

"Quite well. She 's with Lady Bellair, in Edinburgh."

Lady Bellair was the bold-faced countess.

"I dinna like her," said Malcolm.

"Who the devil asked you to like her?" said the marquis. But he laughed as he said it.

"I beg yer lordship's pardon," returned Malcolm.

"I said it or I kent. It was nane o' my business wha my leddy was wi'."

"Certainly not. But I don't mind confessing that Lady Bellair is not one I should choose to give authority over Lady Florimel. You have some regard for your young mistress, I know, Malcolm."

"I wad dee for her, my lord."

"That 's a common assertion," said the marquis.

"No wi' fisher fowk. I kenna hoo it may be wi' your fowk, my lord."

"Well, even with us it means something. It implies at least that he who uses it would risk his life for her whom he wishes to believe it. But perhaps it may mean more than that in the mouth of a fisherman? Do you fancy there is such a thing as devotion—real devotion, I mean—self-sacrifice, you know?"

"I daurna doobt it, my lord."

"Without fee or hope of reward?"

"There maun be some cawpable o' 't, my lord, or what for sud the warl' be? What ither sud haud it ohn been destroyt as Sodom was for the want o' the ten richteous? There maun be saut whaur corruption hasna the thing a' its ain gait."

"You certainly have pretty high notions of things,

MacPhail! For my part, I can easily enough imagine a man risking his life; but devoting it!—that 's another thing altogether."

"There maun be 'at wad du a' 'at cud be dune, my lord."

"What, for instance, would you do for Lady Florimel, now? You say you would die for her: what does dying mean on a fisherman's tongue?"

"It means a' thing, my lord—short o' ill. I wad sterve for her, but I wadna steal. I wad fecht for her, but I wadna lee."

"Would you be her servant all your days? Come, now!"

"Mair nor willin'ly, my lord—gien she wad only hae me, an' keep me."

"But suppose you came to inherit the Kirkbyres property?"

"My lord," said Malcolm solemnly, "that 's a puir test to put me till. It gangs for naething. I wad raither clean my leddy's butes frae mornin' to nicht, nor be the son o' that wuman, gien she war a born duchess. Try me wi' something worth yer lordship's mou'."

But the marquis seemed to think he had gone far enough for the present. With gleaming eyes he

rose, took his withered love-letter from the table, put it in his waistcoat pocket, and saying—

"Well, find out for me what this is they 're about with the school-master," walked to the door.

"I ken a' aboot that, my lord," answered Malcolm "ohn speirt at onybody."

Lord Lossie turned from the door, ordered him to bring his riding coat and boots, and, ringing the bell, sent a message to Stoat to saddle the bay mare.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LAIRD AND HIS MOTHER.

WHEN Malcolm and Joseph set out from Duff-Harbour to find the laird, they could hardly be said to have gone in search of him; all in their power was to seek the parts where he was occasionally seen, in the hope of chancing upon him; and they wandered in vain about the woods of Fife House all that week, returning disconsolate every evening to their little inn on the banks of the Wan Water. Sunday came and went without yielding a trace of him; and, almost in despair, they resolved, if unsuccessful the next day, to get assistance and organize a search for him. Monday passed like the days that had preceded it, and they were returning dejectedly down the left bank of the Wan Water, in the gloamin', and nearing a part where it is hemmed in by precipitous rocks, and is very narrow and deep, crawling slow and black under the lofty arch of an ancient bridge that spans it at one leap, when suddenly they caught sight of a head peering at them over the parapet. They dared not run for fear of terrifying

him, if it should be the laird, and hurried quietly to the spot. But when they reached the end of the bridge its round back was bare from end to end. On the other side of the river, the trees came close up, and pursuit was hopeless in the gathering darkness.

"Laird, laird! they've taen awa' Phemy, an' we dinna ken whaur to luik for her," cried the poor father aloud.

Almost the same instant, and as if he had issued from the ground, the laird stood before them. The men started back with astonishment—soon changed into pity, for there was light enough to see how miserable the poor fellow looked. Neither exposure nor privation had thus wrought upon him: he was simply dying of fear. Having greeted Joseph with embarrassment, he kept glancing doubtfully at Malcolm, as if ready to run on his least movement. In few words Joseph explained their quest, with trembling voice and tears that would not be denied enforcing the tale. Ere he had done, the laird's jaw had fallen, and further speech was impossible to him. But by gestures sad and plain enough, he indicated that he knew nothing of her, and had supposed her safe at home with her parents.

In vain they tried to persuade him to go back with them, promising every protection: for sole answer he shook his head mournfully.

There came a sudden gust of wind among the branches. Joseph, little used to trees and their ways with the wind, turned towards the sound, and Malcolm unconsciously followed his movement. When they turned again, the laird had vanished, and they took their way homeward in sadness.

What passed next with the laird, can be but conjectured. It came to be well enough known afterwards where he had been hiding; and had it not been dusk as they came down the river-bank, the two men might, looking up to the bridge from below, have had it suggested to them. For in the half spandrel-wall between the first arch and the bank, they might have spied a small window, looking down on the sullen, silent gloom, foam-flecked with past commotion, that crept languidly away from beneath. It belonged to a little vaulted chamber in the bridge, devised by some vanished lord as a kind of summer-house—long neglected, but having in it yet a mouldering table, a broken chair or two, and a rough bench. A little path led steep from the end of the parapet down to its hidden

door. It was now used only by the gamekeepers for traps, and fishing-gear, and odds and ends of things, and was generally supposed to be locked up. The laird had, however, found it open, and his refuge in it had been connived at by one of the men, who, as they heard afterwards, had given him the key, and assisted him in carrying out a plan he had devised for barricading the door. It was from this place he had so suddenly risen at the call of Blue Peter, and to it he had as suddenly withdrawn again —to pass in silence and loneliness through his last purgatorial pain.*

Mrs. Stewart was sitting in her drawing-room alone: she seldom had visitors at Kirkbyres—not that she liked being alone, or indeed being there at all, for she would have lived on the Continent but that her son's trustees, partly to indulge their own aversion to her, taking upon them a larger discretionary power than rightly belonged to them, kept her too straitened, which no doubt in the recoil had its share in poor Stephen's misery. It

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* *Com' io fui dentro, in un bogliente vetro*
Gittato mi sarei per rinfrescarmi,
Tant' era ivi lo 'ncendio senza metro.
Del Purgatorio, xxvii. 49.

was only after scraping for a whole year that she could escape to Paris or Homburg, where she was at home. There her sojourn was determined by her good or ill fortune at faro.

What she meditated over her knitting by the fire-light,—she had put out her candles,—it would be hard to say, perhaps unwholesome to think:—there are souls to look into which is, to our dim eyes, like gazing down from the verge of one of the Swedenborgian pits.

But much of the evil done by human beings is as the evil of evil beasts: they know not what they do—an excuse which, except in regard of the past, no man can make for himself, seeing the very making of it must testify its falsehood.

She looked up, gave a cry, and started to her feet: Stephen stood before her, half-way between her and the door. Revealed in a flicker of flame from the fire, he vanished in the following shade, and for a moment she stood in doubt of her seeing sense. But when the coal flashed again, there was her son, regarding her out of great eyes that looked as if they had seen death. A ghastly air hung about him, as if he had just come back from Hades, but in his silent bearing there was a sanity, even

dignity, which strangely impressed her. He came forward a pace or two, stopped, and said:—

"Dinna be frichtit, mem. I 'm come. Sen' the lassie hame, an' du wi' me as ye like. I canna haud aff o' me. But I think I 'm deein', an' ye needna misguide me."

His voice, although it trembled a little, was clear and unimpeded, and, though weak, in its modulation manly.

Something in the woman's heart responded. Was it motherhood—or the deeper godhead? Was it pity for the dignity housed in the crumbling clay, or repentance for the son of her womb? Or was it that sickness gave hope, and she could afford to be kind?

"I don't know what you mean, Stephen," she said, more gently than he had ever heard her speak.

Was it an agony of mind or of body, or was it but a flickering of the shadows upon his face? A moment, and he gave a half-choked shriek, and fell on the floor. His mother turned from him with disgust, and rang the bell.

"Send Tom here," she said.

An elderly hard-featured man came.

"Stephen is in one of his fits," she said.

The man looked about him: he could see no one in the room but his mistress.

"There he is," she continued, pointing to the floor. "Take him away. Get him up to the loft and lay him in the hay."

The man lifted his master like an unwieldy log, and carried him convulsed from the room.

Stephen's mother sat down again by the fire, and resumed her knitting.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAIRD'S VISION.

MALCOLM had just seen his master set out for his solitary ride, when one of the maids informed him that a man from Kirkbyres wanted him. Hiding his reluctance, he went with her and found Tom, who was Mrs. Stewart's grieve, and had been about the place all his days.

"Mr. Stephen 's come hame, sir," he said, touching his bonnet, a civility for which Malcolm was not grateful.

"It 's no possible!" returned Malcolm. "I saw him last nicht."

"He cam aboot ten o'clock, sir, an' hed a turn o' the fa'in' sickness o' the spot. He 's verra ill the noo, an' the mistress sent me ower to speir gien ye wad obleege her by gaein' to see him."

"Has he ta'en till 's bed?" asked Malcolm.

"We pat him till 't, sir. He 's ravin' mad, an' I 'm thinkin' he 's no far frae his hin'er en'."

"I 'll gang wi' ye direckly," said Malcolm.

In a few minutes they were riding fast along

the road to Kirkbyres, neither with much to say to the other, for Malcolm distrusted every one about the place, and Tom was by nature taciturn.

"What garred them sen' for me—div ye ken?" asked Malcolm at length, when they had gone about half-way.

"He cried oot upo' ye i' the nicht," answered Tom.

When they arrived, Malcolm was shown into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Stewart met him with red eyes.

"Will you come and see my poor boy?" she said.

"I wull du that, mem. Is he verra ill?"

"Very. I'm afraid he is in a bad way."

She led him to a dark old-fashioned chamber, rich and gloomy. There, sunk in the down of a huge bed with carved ebony posts, lay the laird, far too ill to be incommoded by the luxury to which he was unaccustomed. His head kept tossing from side to side, and his eyes seemed searching in vacancy.

"Has the doctor been to see 'im, mem?" asked Malcolm.

"Yes; but he says he can't do anything for him."

"Wha waits upon 'im, mem?"

"One of the maids and myself."

"I'll jist bide wi' 'im."

"That will be very kind of you."

"I s' bide wi' 'im till I see 'im oot o' this, ae w'y or ither," added Malcolm, and sat down by the bedside of his poor distrustful friend. There Mrs. Stewart left him.

The laird was wandering in the thorny thickets and slimy marshes which, haunted by the thousand mis-shapen horrors of delirium, beset the gates of life. That one so near the light, and slowly drifting into it, should lie tossing in hopeless darkness! Is it that the delirium falls, a veil of love, to hide other and more real terrors?

His eyes would now and then meet those of Malcolm, as they gazed tenderly upon him, but the living thing that looked out of the windows was darkened, and saw him not. Occasionally a word would fall from him, or a murmur of half-articulation float up, like the sound of a river of souls; but whether Malcolm heard, or only seemed to hear something like this, he could not tell, for he could not be certain that he had not himself shaped the

words by receiving the babble into the moulds of the laird's customary thought and speech.

"I dinna ken whaur I cam frae!—I kenna whaur I 'm gaein' till.—Eh, gien he wad but come oot an' shaw himsel'!—O Lord! tak the deevil aff o' my puir back.—O Father o' lichts! gar him tak the hump wi' him. I hae no fawvour for 't, though it 's been my constant compainion this mony a lang."

But in general, he only moaned, and after the words thus heard or fashioned by Malcolm, lay silent and nearly still for an hour.

All the waning afternoon Malcolm sat by his side, and neither mother, maid, nor doctor came near them.

"Dark wa's an' no a breath!" he murmured or seemed to murmur again. "Nae gerse, nor flooers, nor bees!—I hae na room for my hump, an' I canna lie upo' 't, for that wad kill me!—Wull I *ever* ken whaur I cam frae?—The wine 's unco guid. Gie me a drap mair, gien ye please, Lady Horn. —I thought the grave was a better place. I hae lain safter afore I dee'd.—Phemy! Phemy! Rin, Phemy, rin! I s' bide wi' them this time. Ye rin, Phemy!"

As it grew dark, the air turned very chill, and snow began to fall thick and fast. Malcolm laid a few sticks on the smouldering peat-fire, but they were damp and did not catch. All at once the laird gave a shriek, and crying out, "Mither, mither!" fell into a fit so violent that the heavy bed shook with his convulsions. Malcolm held his wrists and called aloud. No one came, and, bethinking himself that none could help, he waited in silence for what would follow.

The fit passed quickly, and he lay quiet. The sticks had meantime dried, and suddenly they caught fire and blazed up. The laird turned his face towards the flame; a smile came over it; his eyes opened wide, and with such an expression of seeing gazed beyond Malcolm, that he turned his in the same direction.

"Eh, the bonny man! The bonny man!" murmured the laird.

But Malcolm saw nothing, and turned again to the laird: his jaw had fallen, and the light was fading out of his face like the last of a sunset. He was dead.

Malcolm rang the bell, told the woman who answered it what had taken place, and hurried

from the house, glad at heart that his friend was at rest.

He had ridden but a short distance when he was overtaken by a boy on a fast pony, who pulled up as he neared him.

"Whaur are ye for?" asked Malcolm.

"I'm gaein' for Mistress Cat'nach," answered the boy.

"Gang yer wa's than, an' dinna haud the deid waitin'," said Malcolm, with a shudder.

The boy cast a look of dismay behind him, and galloped off.

The snow still fell, and the night was dark. Malcolm spent nearly two hours on the way, and met the boy returning, who told him that Mrs. Catanach was not to be found.

His road lay down the glen, past Duncan's cottage, at whose door he dismounted, but he did not find him. Taking the bridle on his arm he walked by his horse the rest of the way. It was about nine o'clock, and the night very dark. As he neared the house, he heard Duncan's voice.

"Malcolm, my son! Will it pe your own self?" it said.

"It wull that, daddy," answered Malcolm.

The piper was sitting on a fallen tree, with the snow settling softly upon him.

"But it 's ower cauld for ye to be sittin' there i' the snaw, an' the mirk tu!" added Malcolm.

"Ta tarkness will not be ketting to ta inside of her," returned the seer. "Ah, my poy! where ta light kets in, ta tarkness will pe ketting in too. This now, your whole pody will pe full of tarkness, as ta piple will say, and Tuncan's pody—tat will pe full of ta light." Then with suddenly changed tone he said—"Listen, Malcolm, my son! She 'll pe fery uneasy till you 'll wass pe come home."

"What 's the maitter noo, daddy?" returned Malcolm. "Onything wrang aboot the hoose?"

"Something will pe wrong, yes, put she 'll not can tell where. No, her pody will not pe full of light! For town here in ta curset Lowlands, ta sight has peen almost cone from her, my son. It will now pe no more as a co creeping troo' her, and she 'll nefer see plain no more till she 'll pe cone pack to her own mountains."

"The puir laird's gane back to his," said Malcolm. "I won'er gien he kens yet, or gien he gangs speirin' at ilk ane he meets gien he can tell him whaur he cam frae. He's mad nae mair, ony gait."

"How? Will he pe not tead? Ta poor lairt! Ta poor maad lairt!"

"Ay, he's deid: maybe that's what 'll be troublin' yer sicht, daddy."

"No, my son. Ta maad lairt was not fery maad, and if he was maad he was not paad, and it was not to ta plame of him; he wass coot always however."

"He was that, daddy."

"But it will pe something fery paad, and it will pe troubling her speerit. When she 'll pe take ta pipes, to pe amusing herself, and will plow *Till an crodh a' Dhonnachaidh* (*Turn the Cows, Duncan*), out will pe come *Cumhadh an fhir mhoir* (*The Lament of the Big Man*). All is not well, my son."

"Weel, dinna distress yersel', daddy. Lat come what wull come. Foreseein' 's no forefen'in'. Ye ken yersel' 'at mony 's the time the seer has broucht the thing on by tryin' to haud it aff."

"It will pe true, my son. Put it would aalways haf come."

"Nae doobt; sae ye jist come in wi' me, daddy, an' sit doon by the ha' fire, an' I 'll come to ye as sune 's I 've been to see 'at the maister disna want me. But ye 'll better come up wi' me to my room

first," he went on, "for the maister disna like to see me in onything but the kilt."

"And why will he not pe in ta kilts aal as now?"

"I hae been ridin', ye ken, daddy, an' the trews fits the saiddle better nor the kilts."

"She 'll not pe knowing tat. Old Allister, your creat— her own crandfather, was ta pest horseman ta worrlt efer saw, and he 'll nefer pe hafing ta trews to his own lecks nor ta saddle to his horse's pack. He 'll chust make his men pe strap on an old plaid, and he 'll pe kive a chump, and away they wass, horse and man, one peast, aal two of tem poth together."

Thus chatting they went to the stable, and from the stable to the house, where they met no one, and went straight up to Malcolm's room—the old man making as little of the long ascent as Malcolm himself.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CRY FROM THE CHAMBER.

BROODING, if a man of his temperament may ever be said to brood, over the sad history of his young wife and the prospects of his daughter, the marquis rode over fields and through gates —he never had been one to jump a fence in cold blood—till the darkness began to fall; and the bearings of his perplexed position came plainly before him.

First of all, Malcolm acknowledged, and the date of his mother's death known, what would Florimel be in the eyes of the world? Supposing the world deceived by the statement that his mother died when he was born, where yet was the future he had marked out for her? He had no money to leave her, and she must be helplessly dependent on her brother.

Malcolm, on the other hand, might make a good match, or, with the advantages he could secure him, in the army, still better in the navy, well enough push his way in the world.

Miss Horn could produce no testimony; and Mrs. Catanach had asserted him the son of Mrs. Stewart. He had seen enough, however, to make him dread certain possible results if Malcolm were acknowledged as the laird of Kirkbyres. No; there was but one hopeful measure, one which he had even already approached in a tentative way—an appeal, namely, to Malcolm himself—in which, acknowledging his probable rights, but representing in the strongest manner the difficulty of proving them, he would set forth, in their full dismay, the consequences to Florimel of their public recognition, and offer, upon the pledge of his word to a certain line of conduct, to start him in any path he chose to follow.

Having thought the thing out pretty thoroughly, as he fancied, and resolved at the same time to feel his way towards negotiations with Mrs. Catanach, he turned and rode home.

After a tolerable dinner, he was sitting over a bottle of the port which he prized beyond anything else his succession had brought him, when the door of the dining-room opened suddenly, and the butler appeared, pale with terror.

"My lord! my lord!" he stammered, as he closed the door behind him.

"Well? What the devil's the matter now? Whose cow 's dead?"

"Your lordship didn't hear it then?" faltered the butler.

"You 've been drinking, Bings," said the marquis, lifting his seventh glass of port.

"*I* didn't say I heard it, my lord."

"Heard what—in the name of Beelzebub?"

"The ghost, my lord."

"The what?" shouted the marquis.

"That 's what they call it, my lord. It 's all along of having that wizard's chamber in the house, my lord."

"You 're a set of fools," said the marquis, "—the whole kit of you!"

"That's what I say, my lord. I don't know what to do with them, stericking and screaming. Mrs. Courthope is trying her best with them; but it 's my belief she 's about as bad herself."

The marquis finished his glass of wine, poured out and drank another, then walked to the door. When the butler opened it, a strange sight met his eyes. All the servants in the house, men and women, Duncan and Malcolm alone excepted, had crowded after the butler, every one afraid of being

left behind; and there gleamed the crowd of ghastly faces in the light of the great hall-fire. Demon stood in front, his mane bristling, and his eyes flaming. Such was the silence that the marquis heard the low howl of the waking wind, and the snow like the patting of soft hands against the windows. He stood for a moment, more than half-enjoying their terror, when from somewhere in the building a far-off shriek, shrill and piercing, rang in every ear. Some of the men drew in their breath with a gasping sob, but most of the women screamed outright, and that set the marquis cursing.

Duncan and Malcolm had but just entered the bedroom of the latter, when the shriek rent the air close beside, and for a moment deafened them. So agonized, so shrill, so full of dismal terror was it, that Malcolm stood aghast, and Duncan started to his feet with responsive outcry. But Malcolm at once recovered himself.

"Bide here till I come back," he whispered, and hurried noiselessly out.

In a few minutes he returned—during which all had been still.

"Noo, daddy," he said, "I 'm gaein' to drive in the door o' the neist room. There 's some deevilry

at wark there. Stan' ye i' the door, an' ghaist or deevil 'at wad win by ye, grip it, an' haud on like Demon the dog."

"She will so, she will so!" muttered Duncan in a strange tone. "Ochone! that she'll not pe hafing her turk with her! Ochone! Ochone!"

Malcolm took the key of the wizard's chamber from his chest, and his candle from the table, which he set down in the passage. In a moment he had unlocked the door, put his shoulder to it, and burst it open. A light was extinguished, and a shapeless figure went gliding away through the gloom. It was no shadow, however, for, dashing itself against a door at the other side of the chamber, it staggered back with an imprecation of fury and fear, pressed two hands to its head, and, turning at bay, revealed the face of Mrs. Catanach.

In the door stood the blind piper, with outstretched arms, and hands ready to clutch, the fingers curved like claws, his knees and haunches bent, leaning forward like a rampant beast prepared to spring. In his face was wrath, hatred, vengeance, disgust—an enmity of all mingled kinds.

Malcolm was busied with something in the bed, and when she turned, Mrs. Catanach saw only the

white face of hatred gleaming through the darkness.

"Ye auld donnert deevil!" she cried, with an addition too coarse to be set down, and threw herself upon him.

The old man said never a word, but with indrawn breath hissing through his clenched teeth, clutched her, and down they went together in the passage, the piper undermost. He had her by the throat, it is true, but she had her fingers in his eyes, and kneeling on his chest, kept him down with a vigour of hostile effort that drew the very picture of murder. It lasted but a moment, however, for the old man, spurred by torture as well as hate, gathered what survived of a most sinewy strength into one huge heave, threw her back into the room, and rose, with the blood streaming from his eyes—just as the marquis came round the near end of the passage, followed by Mrs. Courthope, the butler, Stoat, and two of the footmen. Heartily enjoying a *row*, he stopped instantly, and signing a halt to his followers, stood listening to the mud-geyser that now burst from Mrs. Catanach's throat.

"Ye blin' abortion o' Sawtan's soo!" she cried, "didna I tak ye to du wi' ye as I likit. An' that

deil's tripe ye ca' yer oye (*grandson*)—he! he!—*him* yer gran'son! He 's naething but ane o' yer hatit Cawm'ells!"

"A teanga a' diabhuil mhoir, tha thu ag dèanamh breug (*O tongue of the great devil, thou art making a lie*)!" screamed Duncan, speaking for the first time."

"God lay me deid i' my sins gien he be onything but a bastard Cawm'ell!" she asseverated with a laugh of demoniacal scorn. "Yer dautit (*petted*) Ma'colm 's naething but the dyke-side brat o' the late Grizel Cawm'ell, 'at the fowk tuik for a sant 'cause she grat an' said naething. I laid the Cawm'ell pup i' yer boody (*scarecrow*) airms wi' my ain han's, upo' the tap o' yer curst scraighin' bagpipes 'at sae aften drave the sleep frae my een. Na, ye wad nane o' me! But I ga'e ye a Cawm'ell bairn to yer hert for a' that, ye auld, hungert, weyver (*spider*)-leggit, worm-aten idiot!"

A torrent of Gaelic broke from Duncan, into the midst of which rushed another from Mrs. Catanach, similar, but coarse in vowel and harsh in consonant sounds.

The marquis stepped into the room.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he said with dignity.

The tumult of Celtic altercation ceased. The piper drew himself up to his full height, and stood silent. Mrs. Catanach, red as fire with exertion and wrath, turned ashy pale. The marquis cast on her a searching and significant look.

"See here, my lord," said Malcolm.

Candle in hand, his lordship approached the bed. The same moment Mrs. Catanach glided out with her usual downy step, gave a wink as of mutual intelligence to the group at the door, and vanished.

On Malcolm's arm lay the head of a young girl. Her thin, worn countenance was stained with tears, and livid with suffocation. She was recovering, but her eyes rolled stupid and visionless.

"It 's Phemy, my lord—Blue Peter's lassie 'at was tint," said Malcolm.

"It begins to look serious," said the marquis. "Mrs. Catanach!—Mrs. Courthope!"

He turned towards the door. Mrs. Courthope entered, and a head or two peeped in after her. Duncan stood as before, drawn up and stately, his visage working, but his body motionless as the statue of a sentinel.

"Where is the Catanach woman gone?" cried the marquis.

"Cone!" shouted the piper. "Cone! and her huspant will pe waiting to pe killing her! Och nan ochan!"

"Her husband!" echoed the marquis.

"Ach! she 'll not can pe helping it, my lort—no more till one will pe tead—and tat should pe ta woman, for she 'll pe a paad woman—ta worstest woman efer was married, my lort."

"That 's saying a good deal," returned the marquis.

"Not one worrt more as enough, my lort," said Duncan. "She was only pe her next wife, put, ochone! ochone! why did she 'll pe marry her? You would haf stapt her long aco, my lort, if she 'll was your wife, and you was knowing ta tamned fox and padger she was pe. Ochone! and she tidn't pe have her turk at her hench nor her sgian in her hose."

He shook his hands like a despairing child, then stamped and wept in the agony of frustrated rage.

Mrs. Courthope took Phemy in her arms, and carried her to her own room, where she opened the window, and let the snowy wind blow full upon her. As soon as she came quite to herself, Malcolm set out to bear the good tidings to her father and mother.

Only a few nights before had Phemy been taken

to the room where they found her. She had been carried from place to place, and had been some time, she believed, in Mrs. Catanach's own house. They had always kept her in the dark, and removed her at night, blindfolded. When asked if she had never cried out before, she said she had been too frightened; and when questioned as to what had made her do so then, she knew nothing of it: she remembered only that a horrible creature appeared by the bedside, after which all was blank. On the floor they found a hideous death-mask, doubtless the cause of the screams which Mrs. Catanach had sought to stifle with the pillows and bedclothes.

When Malcolm returned, he went at once to the piper's cottage, where he found him in bed, utterly exhausted, and as utterly restless.

"Weel, daddy," he said, "I doobt I daurna come near ye noo."

"Come to her arms, my poor poy!" faltered Duncan. "She 'll pe sorry in her sore heart for her poy! Nefer you pe minding, my son; you couldn 't help ta Cam'ell mother, and you 'll pe her own poy however. Ochone! it will pe a plot upon you aal your tays, my son, and she 'll not can help you, and it 'll pe preaking her old heart!"

"Gien God thoucht the Cam'ells worth makin', daddy, I dinna see 'at I hae ony richt to compleen 'at I cam' o' them."

"She hopes you 'll pe forgifing ta plind old man, however. She could n't see, or she would haf known at once petter."

"I dinna ken what ye 're efter noo, daddy," said Malcolm.

"That she 'll do you a creat wrong, and she 'll be ferry sorry for it, my son."

"What wrang did ye ever du me, daddy?"

"That she was let you crow up a Cam'ell, my poy. If she tid put know ta paad plood was pe in you, she wouldn't pe tone you ta wrong as pring you up."

"That 's a wrang no ill to forgi'e, daddy. But it 's a pity ye didna lat me lie, for maybe syne Mistress Catanach wad hae broucht me up hersel', an' I micht hae come to something."

"Ta duvil mhor (*great*) would pe in your heart and prain and poosom, my son."

"Weel, ye see what ye hae saved me frae."

"Yes; put ta duvil will pe to pay, for she couldn't safe you from ta Cam'ell plood, my son! Malcolm, my poy," he added after a pause, and with the

solemnity of a mighty hate, "ta efil woman herself will pe a Cam'ell—ta woman Catanach will pe a Cam'ell, and her nain sel' she 'll not know it pefore she 'll be in ta ped with ta worsest Cam'ell tat ever God made—and she pecks his pardon, for she 'll not pelieve he wass making ta Cam'ells."

"Divna ye think God made me, daddy?" asked Malcolm.

The old man thought for a little.

"Tat will tepend on who was pe your father, my son," he replied. "If he too will be a Cam'ell—ochone! ochone! Put tere may pe some coot plood co into you, more as enough to say God will pe make you, my son. Put don't pe asking, Malcolm. Ton't you 'll pe asking."

"What am I no to ask, daddy?"

"Ton't pe asking who made you — who was ta father to you, my poy. She would rather not pe knowing, for ta man might pe a Cam'ell poth. And if she couldn't pe lofing you no more, my son, she would pe tie pefore her time, and her tays would pe long in ta land under ta crass, my son."

But the memory of the sweet face whose cold loveliness he had once kissed, was enough to outweigh with Malcolm all the prejudices of Duncan's

instillation, and he was proud to take up even her shame. To pass from Mrs. Stewart to her, was to escape from the clutches of a vampire demon to the arms of a sweet mother angel.

Deeply concerned for the newly-discovered misfortunes of the old man to whom he was indebted for this world's life at least, he anxiously sought to soothe him; but he had far more and far worse to torment him than Malcolm even yet knew, and with burning cheeks and bloodshot eyes, he lay tossing from side to side, now uttering terrible curses in Gaelic, and now weeping bitterly. Malcolm took his loved pipes, and with the gentlest notes he could draw from them tried to charm to rest the ruffled waters of his spirit; but his efforts were all in vain, and believing at length that he would be quieter without him, he went to the House, and to his own room.

The door of the adjoining chamber stood open, and the long forbidden room lay exposed to any eye. Little did Malcolm think as he gazed around it, that it was the room in which he had first breathed the air of the world; in which his mother had wept over her own false position and his reported death; and from which he had been carried,

by Duncan's wicked wife, down the ruinous stair, and away to the lip of the sea, to find a home in the arms of the man whom he had just left on his lonely couch, torn between the conflicting emotions of a gracious love for him, and the frightful hate of her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FEET OF WOOL.

THE next day, Miss Horn, punctual as Fate, presented herself at Lossie House, and was shown at once into the marquis's study, as it was called. When his lordship entered, she took the lead the moment the door was shut.

"By this time, my lord, ye 'll doobtless hae made up yer min' to du what 's richt?" she said.

"That 's what I have always wanted to do," returned the marquis.

"Hm!" remarked Miss Horn, as plainly as inarticulately.

"In this affair," he supplemented; adding, "It 's not always so easy to tell what *is* right!"

"It 's no aye easy to luik for 't wi' baith yer een," said Miss Horn.

"This woman Catanach—we must get her to give credible testimony. Whatever the fact may be, we must have strong evidence. And there comes the difficulty, that she has already made an altogether different statement."

"It gangs for naething, my lord. It was never made afore a justice o' the peace."

"I wish you would go to her, and see how she is inclined."

"Me gang to Bawbie Catanach!" exclaimed Miss Horn. "I wad as sune gang an' kittle Sawtan's nose wi' the p'int o' 's tail. Na, na, my lord! Gien onybody gang till her wi' my wull, it s' be a limb o' the law. I s' hae nae cognostin' wi' her."

"You would have no objection, however, to my seeing her, I presume—just to let her know that we have an inkling of the truth?" said the marquis.

Now all this was the merest talk, for of course Miss Horn could not long remain in ignorance of the declaration fury had, the night previous, forced from Mrs. Catanach; but he must, he thought, put her off and keep her quiet, if possible, until he had come to an understanding with Malcolm, after which he would no doubt have his trouble with her.

"Ye can du as yer lordship likes," answered Miss Horn; "but I wadna hae 't said o' me 'at I had ony dealin's wi' her. Wha kens but she micht say ye tried to bribe her? There 's naething she wad bogle at gien she thoucht it worth her while. No 'at I 'm feart at her. Lat her lee! I 'm no

sae blate but——! Only dinna lippen till a word she says, my lord."

The marquis meditated.

"I wonder whether the real source of my perplexity occurs to you, Miss Horn," he said at length. "You know I have a daughter?"

"Weel eneuch that, my lord."

"By my second marriage."

"Nae merridge ava', my lord."

"True,—if I confess to the first."

"A' the same, whether or no, my lord."

"Then you see," the marquis went on, refusing offence, "what the admission of your story would make of my daughter?"

"That 's plain eneuch, my lord."

"Now, if I have read Malcolm right, he has too much regard for his—mistress—to put her in such a false position."

"That is, my lord, ye wad hae yer lawfu' son beir the lawless name."

"No, no; it need never come out what he is. I will provide for him—as a gentleman, of course."

"It canna be, my lord. Ye can du naething for him, wi' that face o' his, but oot comes the trouth as to the father o' 'im; an' it wadna be lang afore the

tale was ekit oot wi' the name o' his mither—Mistress Catanach wad see to that, gien 'twas only to spite me; an' I wunna hae my Grizel ca'd what she is not, for ony lord's dauchter i' the three kynriks."

"What *does* it matter, now she 's dead and gone?" said the marquis, false to the dead in his love for the living.

"Deid an' gane, my lord! What ca' ye deid an' gane? Maybe the great anes o' the yerth get sic a forlethie (*surfeit*) o' grand'ur 'at they 're for nae mair, an' wad perish like the brute-beast. For onything I ken, they may hae their wuss, but for mysel', I wad warstle to haud my sowl waukin' (*awake*), i' the verra article o' deith, for the bare chance o' seein' my bonny Grizel again.—It 's a mercy I hae nae feelin's!" she added, arresting her handkerchief on its way to her eyes, and refusing to acknowledge the single tear that ran down her cheek.

Plainly she was not like any of the women whose characters the marquis had accepted as typical of woman-kind.

"Then you won't leave the matter to her husband and son?" he said reproachfully.

"I tellt ye, my lord, I wad du naething but what I saw to be richt. Lat this affair oot o' my han's I

daurna. That laad ye micht work to onything 'at made agane himsel'. He 's jist like his puir mither there."

"If Miss Campbell *was* his mother," said the marquis.

"Miss Cam'ell!" cried Miss Horn. "I 'll thank yer lordship to ca' her by her ain, an' that 's Lady Lossie."

What of the something ruinous heart of the marquis was habitable, was occupied by his daughter, and had no accommodation at present either for his dead wife or his living son. Once more he sat thinking in silence for a while.

"I 'll make Malcolm a post captain in the navy, and give you a thousand pounds," he said at length, hardly knowing that he spoke.

Miss Horn rose to her full height, and stood like an angel of rebuke before him. Not a word did she speak, only looked at him for a moment, and turned to leave the room. The marquis saw his danger, and striding to the door, stood with his back against it.

"Think ye to scare *me*, my lord?" she asked, with a scornful laugh. "Gang an' scare the stane lion-beast at yer ha' door. Haud oot o' the gait, an' lat me gang."

"Not until I know what you are going to do," said the marquis, very seriously.

"I hae naething mair to transac' wi' yer lordship. You an' me 's strangers, my lord."

"Tut! tut! I was but trying you."

"An' gien I had taen the disgrace ye offert me, ye wad hae drawn back?"

"No, certainly."

"Ye wasna tryin' me than; ye was duin' yer best to corrup' me."

"I 'm no splitter of hairs."

"My lord, it 's nane but the corrup'ible wad seek to corrup'."

The marquis gnawed a nail or two in silence. Miss Horn dragged an easy chair within a couple of yards of him.

"We 'll see wha tires o' this ghem first, my lord!" she said, as she sank into its hospitable embrace.

The marquis turned to lock the door, but there was no key in it. Neither was there any chair within reach, and he was not fond of standing. Clearly his enemy had the advantage.

"Hae ye h'ard o' puir Sandy Graham—hoo they 're misguidin' him, my lord?" she asked with composure.

The marquis was first astounded, and then tickled by her assurance.

"No," he answered.

"They hae turnt him oot o' hoose an' ha'—schuil, at least, an' hame," she rejoined. "I may say, they hae turnt him oot o' Scotlan'; for what presbytery wad hae him efter he had been fun' guilty o' no thinkin' like ither fowk? Ye maun stan' his guid freen', my lord."

"He shall be Malcolm's tutor," answered the marquis, not to be outdone in coolness, "and go with him to Edinburgh—or Oxford, if he prefers it."

"Never yerl o' Colonsay had a better!" said Miss Horn.

"Softly, softly, ma'am!" returned the marquis. "I did not say he should go in that style."

"He s' gang as my lord o' Colonsay, or he s' no gang at *your* expense, my lord," said his antagonist.

"Really, ma'am, one would think you were my grandmother, to hear you order my affairs for me."

"I wuss I war, my lord: I sud gar ye hear rizzon upo' baith sides o' yer heid, I s' warran'!"

The marquis laughed.

"Well, I can't stand here all day!" he said, impatiently swinging one leg.

"I 'm weel awaur o' that, my lord," answered Miss Horn, re-arranging her scanty skirt.

"How long are you going to keep me, then?"

"I wadna hae ye bide a meenute langer nor 's agreeable to yersel'. But *I*'m in nae hurry sae lang 's ye 're afore me. Ye 're nae ill to luik at—though ye maun hae been bonnier the day ye wan the hert o' my Grizel."

The marquis uttered an oath, and left the door. Miss Horn sprang to it; but there was the marquis again.

"Miss Horn," he said, "I beg you will give me another day to think of this."

"Whaur 's the use? A' the thinkin' i' the warl' canna alter a single fac'. Ye maun du richt by my laddie o' yer ain sel', or I maun gar ye."

"You would find a law-suit heavy, Miss Horn."

"An' ye wad fin' the scandal o' 't ill to bide, my lord. It wad come sair upo' Miss —— I kenna what name she has a richt till, my lord."

The marquis uttered a frightful imprecation, left the door, and sitting down, hid his face in his hands.

Miss Horn rose, but instead of securing her retreat, approached him gently, and stood by his side.

"My lord," she said, "I canna thole to see a

man in tribble. Women 's born till 't, an' they tak it, an' are thankfu'; but a man never gies in till 't, an' sae it comes harder upo' him nor upo' them. Hear me, my lord: gien there be a man upo' this earth wha wad shield a wuman, that man 's Ma'colm Colonsay."

"If only she weren 't his sister!" murmured the marquis.

"An' jist bethink ye, my lord: wad it be onything less nor an imposition to lat a man merry her ohn tellt him what she was?"

"You insolent old woman!" cried the marquis, losing his temper, discretion, and manners, all together. "Go and do your worst, and be damned to you!"

So saying, he left the room, and Miss Horn found her way out of the house in a temper quite as fierce as his,—in character, however, entirely different, inasmuch as it was righteous.

At that very moment Malcolm was in search of his master; and seeing the back of him disappear in the library, to which he had gone in a half-blind rage, he followed him.

"My lord!" he said.

"What do you want?" returned his master

in a rage. For some time he had been hauling on the curb rein, which had fretted his temper the more; and when he let go, the devil ran away with him.

"I thoucht yer lordship wad like to see an auld stair I cam upo' the ither day, 'at gangs frae the wizard's chaumer——"

"Go to hell with your damned tomfoolery!" said the marquis. "If ever you mention that cursed hole again, I'll kick you out of the house."

Malcolm's eyes flashed, and a fierce answer rose to his lips; but he had seen that his master was in trouble, and sympathy supplanted rage. He turned and left the room in silence.

Lord Lossie paced up and down the library for a whole hour—a long time for him to be in one mood. The mood changed colour pretty frequently during the hour, however, and by degrees his wrath assuaged. But at the end of it he knew no more what he was going to do than when he left Miss Horn in the study. Then came the gnawing of his usual ennui and restlessness: he must find something to do.

The thing he always thought of first was a ride; but the only animal of horse-kind about the place which he liked was the bay mare, and her he had lamed. He would go and see what the rascal had

come bothering about—alone though, for he could not endure the sight of the fisher-fellow—damn him!

In a few moments he stood in the wizard's chamber, and glanced round it with a feeling of discomfort rather than sorrow—of annoyance at the trouble of which it had been for him both fountain and storehouse, rather than regret for the agony and contempt which his selfishness had brought upon the woman he loved; then spying the door in the furthest corner, he made for it, and in a moment more, his curiosity now thoroughly roused, was slowly gyrating down the steps of the old screw-stair.

But Malcolm had gone to his own room, and hearing some one in the next, half suspected who it was, and went in. Seeing the closet-door open, he hurried to the stair, and shouted,—

"My lord! my lord! or whaever ye are! tak care hoo ye gang, or ye'll get a terrible fa'."

Down a single yard the stair was quite dark, and he dared not follow fast for fear of himself falling and occasioning the accident he feared. As he descended, he kept repeating his warnings, but either his master did not hear or heeded too little, for presently Malcolm heard a rush, a dull fall, and a groan. Hurrying

as fast as he dared with the risk of falling upon him, he found the marquis lying amongst the stones in the ground entrance, apparently unable to move, and white with pain. Presently, however, he got up, swore a good deal, and limped swearing into the house.

The doctor, who was sent for instantly, pronounced the knee-cap injured, and applied leeches. Inflammation set in, and another doctor and surgeon were sent for from Aberdeen. They came; applied poultices, and again leeches, and enjoined the strictest repose. The pain was severe; but to one of the marquis's temperament, the enforced quiet was worse.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HANDS OF IRON.

THE marquis was loved by his domestics; and his accident, with its consequences, although none more serious were anticipated, cast a gloom over Lossie House. Far apart as was his chamber from all the centres of domestic life, the pulses of his suffering beat as it were through the house, and the servants moved with hushed voice and gentle footfall.

Outside, the course of events waited upon his recovery, for Miss Horn was too generous not to delay proceedings while her adversary was ill. Besides, what she most of all desired was the marquis's free acknowledgment of his son; and after such a time of suffering and constrained reflection as he was now passing through, he could hardly fail, she thought, to be more inclined to what was just and fair.

Malcolm had of course hastened to the schoolmaster with the joy of his deliverance from Mrs. Stewart; but Mr. Graham had not acquainted him with the discovery Miss Horn had made, or her belief

concerning his large interest therein, to which Malcolm's report of the wrath-born declaration of Mrs. Catanach had now supplied the only testimony wanting, for the right of disclosure was Miss Horn's. To her he had carried Malcolm's narrative of late events, tenfold strengthening her position; but she was anxious in her turn that the revelation concerning his birth should come to him from his father. Hence Malcolm continued in ignorance of the strange dawn that had begun to break on the darkness of his origin.

Miss Horn had told Mr. Graham what the marquis had said about the tutorship; but the schoolmaster only shook his head with a smile, and went on with his preparations for departure.

The hours went by; the days lengthened into weeks, and the marquis's condition did not improve. He had never known sickness and pain before, and like most of the children of this world, counted them the greatest of evils; nor was there any sign of their having as yet begun to open his eyes to what those who have seen them call truths, those who have never even boded their presence count absurdities.

More and more, however, he desired the attendance of Malcolm, who was consequently a great deal

about him, serving with a love to account for which those who knew his nature would not have found it necessary to fall back on the instinct of the relation between them. The marquis had soon satisfied himself that that relation was as yet unknown to him, and was all the better pleased with his devotion and tenderness.

The inflammation continued, increased, spread, and at length the doctors determined to amputate. But the marquis was absolutely horrified at the idea, —shrank from it with invincible repugnance. The moment the first dawn of comprehension vaguely illuminated their periphrastic approaches, he blazed out in a fury, cursed them frightfully, called them all the contemptuous names in his rather limited vocabulary, and swore he would see them——uncomfortable first.

"We fear mortification, my lord," said the physician calmly.

"So do I. Keep it off," returned the marquis.

"We fear we cannot, my lord."

It had, in fact, already commenced.

"Let it mortify, then, and be damned," said his lordship.

"I trust, my lord, you will reconsider it," said the

surgeon. "We should not have dreamed of suggesting a measure of such severity had we not had reason to dread that the further prosecution of gentler means would but lessen your lordship's chance of recovery."

"You mean then that my life is in danger?"

"We fear," said the physician, "that the amputation proposed is the only thing that can save it."

"What a brace of blasted bunglers you are!" cried the marquis, and turning away his face, lay silent.

The two men looked at each other and said nothing.

Malcolm was by, and a keen pang shot to his heart at the verdict. The men retired to consult. Malcolm approached the bed.

"My lord!" he said gently.

No reply came.

"Dinna lea 's oor lanes, my lord—no yet," Malcolm persisted. "What 's to come o' my leddy?"

The marquis gave a gasp. Still he made no reply.

"She has naebody, ye ken, my lord, 'at ye wad like to lippen her wi'."

"You must take care of her when I am gone, Malcolm," murmured the marquis; and his voice

was now gentle with sadness and broken with misery.

"Me, my lord!" returned Malcolm. "Wha wad min' me? An' what cud I du wi' her? I cudna even haud her ohn wat her feet. Her leddy's-maid cud du mair wi' her—though I wad lay doon my life for her, as I tauld ye, my lord—an' she kens 't weel eneuch."

Silence followed. Both men were thinking.

"Gie me a richt, my lord, an' I'll du my best," said Malcolm, at length breaking the silence.

"What do you mean?" growled the marquis, whose mood had altered.

"Gie me a legal richt, my lord, an' see gien I dinna."

"See what?"

"See gien I dinna luik weel efter my leddy."

"How am I to see? I shall be dead and damned."

"Please God, my lord, ye'll be alive an' weel—in a better place, if no here to luik efter my leddy yersel'."

"Oh, I dare say!" muttered the marquis.

"But ye'll hearken to the doctors, my lord," Malcolm went on, "an' no dee wantin' time to consider o' 't."

"Yes, yes; to-morrow I'll have another talk with them. We'll see about it. There's time enough yet. They're all coxcombs—every one of them. They never give a patient the least credit for common sense."

"I dinna ken, my lord," said Malcolm doubtfully.

After a few minutes' silence, during which Malcolm thought he had fallen asleep, the marquis resumed abruptly.

"What do you mean by giving you a legal right?" he said.

"There's some w'y o' makin' ae body guairdian till anither, sae 'at the law 'ill uphaud him—isna there, my lord?"

"Yes, surely.——Well!—Rather odd—wouldn't it be?—A young fisher-lad guardian to a marchioness! —Eh? They say there's nothing new under the sun; but that sounds rather like it, I think."

Malcolm was overjoyed to hear him speak with something like his old manner. He felt he could stand any amount of chaff from him now, and so the proposition he had made in seriousness, he went on to defend in the hope of giving amusement, yet with a secret wild delight in the dream of such full devotion to the service of Lady Florimel.

"It wad soon' queer eneuch, my lord, nae doobt; but fowk maunna min' the soon' o' a thing gien 't be a' straucht an' fair, an' strong eneuch to stan'. They cudna lauch me oot o' my richts, be they 'at they likit—Lady Bellair, or ony o' them—na, nor jaw me oot o' them aither!"

"They might do a good deal to render those rights of little use," said the marquis.

"That wad come till a trial o' brains, my lord," returned Malcolm; "an' ye dinna think I wadna hae the wit to speir advice—an' what 's mair, to ken whan it was guid, an' tak it! There 's lawyers, my lord."

"And their expenses?"

"Ye cud lea' sae muckle to be waured (*spent*) upo' the cairryin' oot o' yer lordship's wull."

"Who would see that you applied it properly?"

"My ain conscience, my lord—or Mr. Graham, gien ye likit."

"And how would you live yourself?"

"Ow! lea' ye that to me, my lord. Only dinna imaigine I wad be behauden to yer lordship. I houp I hae mair pride nor that. Ilka poun'-not', shillin', an' baubee sud be laid oot for *her*, an' what was left hainet (*saved*) for her."

"By Jove! it 's a daring proposal!" said the

marquis; and, which seemed strange to Malcolm, not a single thread of ridicule ran through the tone in which he made the remark.

The next day came, but brought neither strength of body nor of mind with it. Again his professional attendants besought him, and he heard them more quietly, but rejected their proposition as positively as before. In a day or two he ceased to oppose it, but would not hear of preparation. Hour glided into hour, and days had gathered to a week, when they assailed him with a solemn and last appeal.

"Nonsense!" answered the marquis. "My leg is getting better. I feel no pain—in fact nothing but a little faintness. Your damned medicines, I haven't a doubt."

"You are in the greatest danger, my lord. It is all but too late even now."

"To-morrow, then—if it must be. To-day I could not endure to have my hair cut—positively; and as to having my leg off,—pooh! the thing 's preposterous!"

He turned white and shuddered, for all the nonchalance of his speech.

When to-morrow came, there was not a surgeon in the land who would have taken his leg off. He

looked in their faces, and seemed for the first time convinced of the necessity of the measure.

"You may do as you please," he said. "I am ready."

"Not to-day, my lord," replied the doctor. "Your lordship is not equal to it to-day."

"I understand," said the marquis, paled frightfully, and turned his head aside.

When Mrs. Courthope suggested that Lady Florimel should be sent for, he flew into a frightful rage, and spoke as it is to be hoped he had never spoken to a woman before. She took it with perfect gentleness, but could not repress a tear. The marquis saw it, and his heart was touched.

"You mustn't mind a dying man's temper," he said.

"It 's not for myself, my lord," she answered.

"I know: you think I 'm not fit to die; and, damn it! you are right. Never one was less fit for heaven, or less willing to go to hell."

"Wouldn't you like to see a clergyman, my lord?" she suggested, sobbing.

He was on the point of breaking out in a still worse passion, but controlled himself.

"A clergyman!" he cried; "I would as soon see

the undertaker. What could he do but tell me I was going to be damned—a fact I know better than he can? That is, if it's not all an invention of the cloth, as, in my soul, I believe it is! I've said so any time this forty years."

"Oh, my lord, my lord! do not fling away your last hope."

"You imagine me to have a chance then? Good soul! You don't know better!"

"The Lord is merciful."

The marquis laughed—that is, he tried, failed, and grinned.

"Mr. Cairns is in the dining-room, my lord."

"Bah! A low pettifogger, with the soul of a bullock! Don't let me hear the fellow's name.—I've been bad enough, God knows! but I haven't sunk to the level of *his* help yet. If he 's God Almighty's factor, and the saw holds—'Like master, like man!'——well, I would rather have nothing to do with either."

"That is, if you had the choice, my lord," said Mrs. Courthope, her temper yielding a little, though in truth his speech was not half so irreverent as it seemed to her.

"Tell him to go to hell. No, don't: set him

down to a bottle of port and a great sponge-cake and you needn't tell him to go to heaven, for he 'll be there already. Why, Mrs. Courthope, the fellow isn't a gentleman! And yet all he cares for the cloth is, that he thinks it makes a gentleman of him—as if anything in heaven, earth, or hell could work that miracle!"

In the middle of the night, as Malcolm sat by his bed, thinking him asleep, the marquis spoke suddenly.

"You must go to Aberdeen to-morrow, Malcolm," he said.

"Verra weel, my lord."

"And bring Mr. Glennie, the lawyer, back with you."

"Yes, my lord."

"Go to bed then."

"I wad raither bide, my lord. I cudna sleep a wink for wantin' to be back aside ye."

The marquis yielded, and Malcolm sat by him all the night through. He tossed about, would doze off and murmur strangely, then wake up and ask for brandy and water, yet be content with the lemonade Malcolm gave him.

Next day he quarrelled with every word Mrs.

Courthope uttered, kept forgetting he had sent Malcolm away, and was continually wanting him. His fits of pain were more severe, alternated with drowsiness, which deepened at times to stupor.

It was late before Malcolm returned. He went instantly to his bedside.

"Is Mr. Glennie with you?" asked his master feebly.

"Yes, my lord."

"Tell him to come here at once."

When Malcolm returned with the lawyer, the marquis directed him to set a table and chair by the bedside, light four candles, get everything necessary for writing, and go to bed.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MARQUIS AND THE SCHOOLMASTER.

BEFORE Malcolm was awake, his lordship had sent for him. When he re-entered the sick-chamber, Mr. Glennie had vanished, the table had been removed, and instead of the radiance of the wax lights, the cold gleam of a vapour-dimmed sun, with its sickly blue-white reflex from the wide-spread snow, filled the room. The marquis looked ghastly, but was sipping chocolate with a spoon.

"What w'y are ye the day, my lord?" asked Malcolm.

"Nearly well," he answered; "but those cursed carrion-crows are set upon killing me—damn their souls!"

"We 'll hae Leddy Florimel sweirin' awfu', gien ye gang on that gait, my lord," said Malcolm.

The marquis laughed feebly.

"An' what 's mair," Malcolm continued, "I doobt they 're some partic'lar aboot the turn o' their phrases up yonner, my lord."

The marquis looked at him keenly.

"You don't anticipate that inconvenience for me?" he said. "I 'm pretty sure to have my billet where they 're not so precise."

"Dinna brak my hert, my lord!" cried Malcolm, the tears rushing to his eyes.

"I should be sorry to hurt you, Malcolm," rejoined the marquis gently, almost tenderly. "I won't go there if I can help it. I should n't like to break any more hearts. But how the devil am I to keep out of it? Besides, there are people up there I don't want to meet; I have no fancy for being made ashamed of myself. The fact is I 'm not fit for such company, and I don't believe there is any such place. But if there be, I trust in God there isn't any other, or it will go badly with your poor master, Malcolm. It doesn't look *like* true—now does it? Only such a multitude of things I thought I had done with for ever, keep coming up and grinning at me! It nearly drives me mad, Malcolm—and I would fain die like a gentleman, with a cool bow and a sharp face-about."

"Wadna ye hae a word wi' somebody 'at kens, my lord?" said Malcolm, scarcely able to reply.

"No," answered the marquis fiercely. "That Cairns is a fool."

"He's a' that, an' mair, my lord. I didna mean *him*."

"They're all fools together."

"Ow, na, my lord! There's a heap o' them no muckle better, it may be; but there's guid men an' true amang them, or the kirk wad hae been wi' Sodom and Gomorrha by this time. But it's no a minister I wad hae yer lordship confar wi'."

"Who then? Mrs. Courthope? Eh?"

"Ow na, my lord—no Mistress Coorthoup! She's a guid body, but she wadna believe her ain een gien onybody ca'd a minister said contrar' to them."

"Who the devil do you mean then?"

"Nae deevil, but an honest man 'at 's been his warst enemy sae lang 's I hae kent him: Maister Graham, the schuilmaister."

"Pooh!" said the marquis with a puff. "I 'm too old to go to school."

"I dinna ken the man 'at isna a bairn till *him*, my lord."

"In Greek and Latin?"

"I' richteousness an' trouth, my lord; in what 's been an' what is to be."

"What! has he the second sight, like the piper?"

"He *has* the second sicht, my lord—but ane 'at gangs a sicht farther nor my auld daddy's."

"He could tell me then what 's going to become of me?"

"As weel 's ony man, my lord."

"That 's not saying much, I fear."

"Maybe mair nor ye think, my lord."

"Well, take him my compliments, and tell him I should like to see him," said the marquis, after a minute's silence.

"He 'll come direckly, my lord."

"Of course he will!" said the marquis.

"Jist as readily, my lord, as he wad gang to ony tramp 'at sent for 'im at sic a time," returned Malcolm, who did not relish either the remark or its tone.

"What do you mean by that? *You* don't think it such a serious affair—do you?"

"My lord, ye haena a chance."

The marquis was dumb. He had actually begun once more to buoy himself up with earthly hopes.

Dreading a recall of his commission, Malcolm slipped from the room, sent Mrs. Courthope to take his place, and sped to the schoolmaster. The

moment Mr. Graham heard the marquis's message, he rose without a word, and led the way from the cottage. Hardly a sentence passed between them as they went, for they were on a solemn errand.

"Mr. Graham 's here, my lord," said Malcolm.

"Where? Not in the room?" returned the marquis.

"Waitin' at the door, my lord."

"Bah! You needn't have been so ready. Have you told the sexton to get a new spade? But you may let him in. And leave him alone with me."

Mr. Graham walked gently up to the bedside.

"Sit down, sir," said the marquis courteously—pleased with the calm, self-possessed, unobtrusive bearing of the man. "They tell me I 'm dying, Mr. Graham."

"I 'm sorry it seems to trouble you, my lord."

"What! wouldn't it trouble you then?"

"I don't think so, my lord."

"Ah! you 're one of the elect, no doubt!"

"That 's a thing I never did think about, my lord."

"What do you think about then?"

"About God."

"And when you die you 'll go straight to heaven of course!"

"I don't know, my lord. That 's another thing I never trouble my head about."

"Ah! you 're like me then! *I* don't care much about going to heaven! What do you care about?"

"The will of God. I hope your lordship will say the same."

"No I won't. I want my own will."

"Well, that is to be had, my lord."

"How?"

"By taking his for yours, as the better of the two, which it must be every way."

"That's all moonshine."

"It *is* light, my lord."

"Well, I don't mind confessing, if I am to die, I should prefer heaven to the other place; but I trust I have no chance of either. Do you now honestly believe there are two such places?"

"I don't know, my lord."

"You don't know! And you come here to comfort a dying man!"

"Your lordship must first tell me what you mean by 'two *such* places.' And as to comfort, going by my notions, I cannot tell which you would be more or less comfortable in; and that, I presume, would be the main point with your lordship."

"And what, pray, sir, would be the main point with you?"

"To get nearer to God."

"Well, I can't say *I* want to get nearer to God. It's little he's ever done for me."

"It's a good deal he has tried to do for you, my lord."

"Well, who interfered? Who stood in his way, then?"

"Yourself, my lord."

"I wasn't aware of it. When did he ever try to do anything for me, and I stood in his way?"

"When he gave you one of the loveliest of women, my lord," said Mr. Graham, with solemn, faltering voice, "and you left her to die in neglect, and her child to be brought up by strangers."

The marquis gave a cry. The unexpected answer had roused the slowly gnawing death, and made it bite deeper.

"What have *you* to do," he almost screamed, "with my affairs? It was for *me* to introduce what I chose of them. You presume."

"Pardon me, my lord: you led me to what I was bound to say. Shall I leave you, my lord?"

The marquis made no answer.

"God knows I loved her," he said after a while, with a sigh.

"You loved her, my lord!"

"I did, by God!"

"Love a woman like that, and come to this?"

"Come to this! We must all come to this, I fancy, sooner or later. Come to what, in the name of Beelzebub?"

"That, having loved a woman like her, you are content to lose her. In the name of God, have you no desire to see her again?"

"It would be an awkward meeting," said the marquis.

His was an old love, alas! He had not been capable of the sort that defies change. It had faded from him until it seemed one of the things that are not! Although his being had once glowed in its light, he could now speak of a meeting as awkward!

"Because you wronged her?" suggested the schoolmaster.

"Because they lied to me, by God!"

"Which they dared not have done, had you not lied to them first."

"Sir!" shouted the marquis, with all the voice he

had left.—"O God, have mercy! I *cannot* punish the scoundrel."

"The scoundrel is the man who lies, my lord."

"Were I anywhere else——"

"There would be no good in telling you the truth, my lord. You showed her to the world as a woman over whom you had prevailed, and not as the honest wife she was. What *kind* of a lie was that, my lord? Not a white one, surely?"

"You are a damned coward to speak so to a man who cannot even turn on his side to curse you for a base hound. You would not dare it but that you know I cannot defend myself."

"You are right, my lord; your conduct is indefensible."

"By heaven! it I could but get this cursed leg under me, I would throw you out of window."

"I shall go by the door, my lord. While you hold by your sins, your sins will hold by you. If you should want me again, I shall be at your lordship's command."

He rose and left the room, but had not reached his cottage before Malcolm overtook him, with a second message from his master. He turned at once, saying only, "I expected it."

"Mr. Graham," said the marquis, looking ghastly, "you must have patience with a dying man. I was very rude to you, but I was in horrible pain."

"Don't mention it, my lord. It would be a poor friendship that gave way for a rough word."

"How can you call yourself my friend?"

"I should be your friend, my lord, if it were only for your wife's sake. She died loving you. I want to send you to her, my lord. You will allow that, as a gentleman, you at least owe her an apology."

"By Jove, you are right, sir!—Then you really and positively believe in the place they call heaven?"

"My lord, I believe that those who open their hearts to the truth, shall see the light on their friends' faces again, and be able to set right what was wrong between them."

"It 's a week too late to talk of setting right!"

"Go and tell her you are sorry, my lord,—that will be enough to her."

"Ah! but there 's more than her concerned."

"You are right, my lord. There is another—one who cannot be satisfied that the fairest works of his hands, or rather the loveliest children of his heart, should be treated as you have treated women."

"But the Deity you talk of——"

"I beg your pardon, my lord: I talked of no deity; I talked of a living Love that gave us birth and calls us his children. Your deity I know nothing of."

"Call him what you please:—*he* won't be put off so easily!"

"He won't be put off one jot or one tittle. He will forgive anything, but he will pass nothing.—Will your wife forgive you?"

"She will—when I explain."

"Then why should you think the forgiveness of God, which created her forgiveness, should be less?"

Whether the marquis could grasp the reasoning, may be doubtful.

"Do you really suppose God cares whether a man comes to good or ill?"

"If he did not, he could not be good himself."

"Then you don't think a good God would care to punish poor wretches like us?"

"Your lordship has not been in the habit of regarding himself as a poor wretch. And, remember, you can't call a child a poor wretch without insulting the father of it."

"That's quite another thing."

"But on the wrong side for your argument—see-

ing the relation between God and the poorest creature is infinitely closer than that between any father and his child."

"Then he can't be so hard on him as the parsons say."

"He will give him absolute justice, which is the only good thing. He will spare nothing to bring his children back to himself—their sole well-being. What would you do, my lord, if you saw your son strike a woman?"

"Knock him down and horsewhip him."

It was Mr. Graham who broke the silence that followed.

"Are you satisfied with yourself, my lord?"

"No, by God!"

"You would like to be better?"

"I would."

"Then you are of the same mind with God."

"Yes; but I'm not a fool! It won't do to say I should like to be. I must be it, and that 's not so easy. It 's damned hard to be good. I would have a fight for it, but there 's no time. How is a poor devil to get out of such an infernal scrape?"

"Keep the commandments."

"That 's it, of course; but there 's no time, I tell

you—at least so those cursed doctors will keep telling me."

"If there were but time to draw another breath, there would be time to begin."

"How am I to begin? Which am I to begin with?"

"There is one commandment which includes all the rest."

"Which is that?"

"To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ."

"That 's cant."

"After thirty years' trial of it, it is to me the essence of wisdom. It has given me a peace which makes life or death all but indifferent to me, though I would choose the latter."

"What am I to believe about him then?"

"You are to believe *in* him, not about him."

"I don't understand."

"He is our Lord and Master, Elder Brother, King, Saviour, the divine Man, the human God: to believe in him is to give ourselves up to him in obedience, to search out his will and do it."

"But there 's no time, I tell you again," the marquis almost shrieked.

"And I tell you, there is all eternity to do it

in. Take him for your master, and he will demand nothing of you which you are not able to perform. This is the open door to bliss. With your last breath you can cry to him, and he will hear you, as he heard the thief on the cross who cried to him dying beside him. 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.' 'To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.' It makes my heart swell to think of it, my lord! No cross-questioning of the poor fellow! No preaching to him! He just took him with him where he was going, to make a man of him."

"Well, you know something of my history: what would you have me do now? At once, I mean. What would the person you speak of have me do?"

"That is not for me to say, my lord."

"You could give me a hint."

"No. God is telling you himself. For me to presume to tell you, would be to interfere with him. What he would have a man do, he lets him know in his mind."

"But what if I had not made up my mind before the last came?"

"Then I fear he would say to you—'Depart from me, thou worker of iniquity.'"

"That would be hard when another minute might have done it."

"If another minute would have done it, you would have had it."

A paroxysm of pain followed, during which Mr. Graham silently left him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

END OR BEGINNING?

WHEN the fit was over, and he found Mr. Graham was gone, he asked Malcolm, who had resumed his watch, how long it would take Lady Florimel to come from Edinburgh.

"Mr. Crathie left wi' fower horses frae the Lossie Airms last nicht, my lord," said Malcolm; "but the ro'ds are ill, an' she winna be here afore some time the morn."

The marquis stared aghast: they had sent for her without his orders.

"What *shall* I do?" he murmured. "If once I look in her eyes, I shall be damned.—Malcolm!"

"Yes, my lord!"

"Is there a lawyer in Portlossie?"

"Yes, my lord; there 's auld Maister Carmichael."

"He won't do! He was my brother's rascal. Is there no one besides?"

"No in Portlossie, my lord. There can be nane nearer than Duff Harbour, I doobt."

"Take the chariot and bring him here directly.

Tell them to put four horses to. Stokes can ride one."

"I 'll ride the ither, my lord."

"You 'll do nothing of the kind : you 're not used to the pole."

"I can tak the leader, my lord."

"I tell you you 're to do nothing of the kind!" cried the marquis angrily. "You 're to ride inside, and bring Mr.—what 's his name ?—back with you."

"Soutar, my lord, gien ye please."

"Be off, then. Don't wait to feed. The brutes have been eating all day, and they can eat all night. You must have him here in an hour."

In an hour and a quarter, Miss Horn's friend stood by the marquis's bedside. Malcolm was dismissed, but was presently summoned again to receive more orders.

Fresh horses were put to the chariot, and he had to set out once more—this time to fetch a justice of the peace, a neighbour-laird. The distance was greater than to Duff Harbour; the roads were worse; the north wind, rising as they went, blew against them as they returned, increasing to a violent gale; and it was late before they reached Lossie House.

When Malcolm entered, he found the marquis alone.

"Is Morrison here at last?" he cried, in a feeble, irritated voice.

"Yes, my lord."

"What the devil kept you so long? The bay mare would have carried me there and back in an hour and a half."

"The roads war verra heavy, my lord. An' jist hear till the win'!"

The marquis listened a moment, and a frightened expression grew over his thin, pale, anxious face.

"You don't know what depends on it," he said, "or you would have driven better. Where is Mr. Soutar?"

"I dinna ken, my lord. I'm only jist come, an' I've seen naebody."

"Go and tell Mrs. Courthope I want Soutar. You'll find her crying somewhere—the old chicken! because I swore at her. What harm could that do the old goose?"

"It'll be mair for love o' yer lordship than fricht at the sweirin', my lord."

"You think so? Why should *she* care? Go and tell her I'm sorry. But really she ought to be

used to me by this time! Tell her to send Soutar directly."

Mr. Soutar was not to be found, the fact being that he had gone to see Miss Horn. The marquis flew into an awful rage, and began to curse and swear frightfully.

"My lord! my lord!" said Malcolm, "for God's sake, dinna gang on that gait. He canna like to hear that kin' o' speech—an' frae ane o' his ain tu!"

The marquis stopped, aghast at his presumption, and choking with rage; but Malcolm's eyes filled with tears, and instead of breaking out again, his master turned his head away and was silent.

Mr. Soutar came.

"Fetch Morrison," said the marquis, "and go to bed."

The wind howled terribly as Malcolm ascended the stairs and half felt his way, for he had no candle, through the long passages leading to his room. As he entered the last, a huge vague form came down upon him, like a deeper darkness through the dark. Instinctively he stepped aside. It passed noiselessly, with a long stride, and not even a rustle of its garments—at least Malcolm heard nothing but the roar of the wind. He turned

and followed it. On and on it went, down the stair, through a corridor, down the great stone turnpike stair, and through passage after passage. When it came into the more frequented and half-lighted thoroughfares of the house, it showed as a large figure in a long cloak, indistinct in outline.

It turned a corner close by the marquis's room. But when Malcolm, close at its heels, turned also, he saw nothing but a vacant lobby, the doors around which were all shut. One after another he quickly opened them, all except the marquis's, but nothing was to be seen. The conclusion was that it had entered the marquis's room. He must not disturb the conclave in the sick chamber with what might be but "a false creation, proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain," and turned back to his own room, where he threw himself on his bed and fell asleep.

About twelve Mrs. Courthope called him: his master was worse, and wanted to see him.

The midnight was dark and still, for the wind had ceased. But a hush and a cloud seemed gathering in the stillness and darkness, and with them came the sense of a solemn celebration, as if the gloom were canopy as well as pall—black, but bordered

and hearted with purple and gold; and the stillness seemed to tremble as with the inaudible tones of a great organ, at the close or commencement of some mighty symphony.

With beating heart he walked softly towards the room where, as on an altar, lay the vanishing form of his master, like the fuel in whose dying flame was offered the late and ill-nurtured sacrifice of his spirit.

As he went through the last corridor leading thither, Mrs. Catanach, type and embodiment of the horrors that haunt the dignity of death, came walking towards him like one at home, her great round body lightly upborne on her soft foot. It was no time to challenge her presence, and yielding her the half of the narrow way, he passed without a greeting. She dropped him a courtesy with an uplook and again a vailing of her wicked eyes.

The marquis would not have the doctor come near him, and when Malcolm entered there was no one in the room but Mrs. Courthope. The shadow had crept far along the dial. His face had grown ghastly, the skin had sunk to the bones, and his eyes stood out as if from much staring into the dark. They rested very mournfully on Malcolm for a few moments, and then closed softly.

"Is she come yet?" he murmured, opening them wide, with sudden stare.

"No, my lord."

The lids fell again, softly, slowly.

"Be good to her, Malcolm," he murmured.

"I wull, my lord," said Malcolm solemnly.

Then the eyes opened and looked at him; something grew in them—a light as of love, and drew up after it a tear; but the lips said nothing. The eyelids fell again, and in a minute more, Malcolm knew by his breathing that he slept.

The slow night waned. He woke sometimes, but soon dozed off again. The two watched by him till the dawn. It brought a still grey morning, without a breath of wind, and warm for the season. The marquis appeared a little revived, but was hardly able to speak. Mostly by signs he made Malcolm understand that he wanted Mr. Graham, but that some one else must go for him. Mrs. Courthope went.

As soon as she was out of the room, he lifted his hand with effort, laid feeble hold on Malcolm's jacket, and drawing him down, kissed him on the forehead. Malcolm burst into tears, and sank weeping by the bedside.

Mr. Graham entering a little after, and seeing Malcolm on his knees, knelt also, and broke into a prayer.

"O blessed Father!" he said, "who knowest this thing, so strange to us, which we call death, breathe more life into the heart of thy dying son, that in the power of life he may front death. O Lord Christ, who diedst thyself, and in thyself knowest it all, heal this man in his sore need—heal him with strength to die."

Came a faint *Amen* from the marquis.

"Thou didst send him into the world: help him out of it. O God, we belong to thee utterly. We dying men are thy children, O living Father! Thou art such a father, that thou takest our sins from us and throwest them behind thy back. Thou cleanest our souls, as thy Son did wash our feet. We hold our hearts up to thee: make them what they must be, O Love, O Life of men, O Heart of hearts! Give thy dying child courage, and hope, and peace—the peace of him who overcame all the terrors of humanity, even death itself, and liveth for evermore, sitting at thy right hand, our God-brother, blessed to all ages—amen."

"Amen!" murmured the marquis, and slowly

lifting his hand from the coverlid, he laid it on the head of Malcolm, who did not know it was the hand of his father, blessing him ere he died.

"Be good to her," said the marquis once more.

But Malcolm could not answer for weeping, and the marquis was not satisfied. Gathering all his force he said again,—

"Be good to her."

"I wull, I wull," burst from Malcolm in sobs, and he wailed aloud.

The day wore on, and the afternoon came. Still Lady Florimel had not arrived, and still the marquis lingered.

As the gloom of the twilight was deepening into the early darkness of the winter night, he opened wide his eyes, and was evidently listening. Malcolm could hear nothing; but the light in his master's face grew, and the strain of his listening diminished. At length Malcolm became aware of the sound of wheels, which came rapidly nearer, till at last the carriage swung up to the hall door. A moment, and Lady Florimel was flitting across the room.

"Papa! papa!" she cried, and, throwing her arm over him, laid her cheek to his.

The marquis could not return her embrace; he could only receive her into the depths of his shining, tearful eyes.

"Flory!" he murmured, "I'm going away. I'm going—I've got—to make an—apology. Malcolm, be good——"

The sentence remained unfinished. The light paled from his countenance—he had to carry it with him. He was dead.

Lady Florimel gave a loud cry. Mrs. Courthope ran to her assistance.

"My lady's in a dead faint!" she whispered, and left the room to get help.

Malcolm lifted Lady Florimel in his great arms, and bore her tenderly to her own apartment. There he left her to the care of her women, and returned to the chamber of death.

Meantime Mr. Graham and Mr. Soutar had come.

When Malcolm re-entered, the schoolmaster took him kindly by the arm and said:

"Malcolm, there can be neither place nor moment fitter for the solemn communication I am commissioned to make to you: I have, as in the presence of your dead father, to inform you that you are now Marquis of Lossie; and God forbid you should

be less worthy as marquis than you have been as fisherman!"

Malcolm stood stupified. For a while he seemed to himself to be turning over in his mind something he had heard read from a book, with a nebulous notion of being somehow concerned in it. The thought of his father cleared his brain. He ran to the dead body, kissed its lips, as he had once kissed the forehead of another, and falling on his knees, wept, he knew not for what. Presently, however, he recovered himself, rose, and, rejoining the two men, said—

"Gentlemen, hoo mony kens this turn o' things?"

"None but Mr. Morrison, Mrs. Catanach, and ourselves—so far as I know," answered Mr. Soutar.

"And Miss Horn," added Mr. Graham. "She first brought out the truth of it, and ought to be the first to know of your recognition by your father."

"I s' tell her mysel'," returned Malcolm. "But, gentlemen, I beg o' ye, till I ken what I 'm aboot an' gie ye leave, dinna open yer moo' to leevin' cratur' aboot this. There 's time eneuch for the warl' to ken 't."

"Your lordship commands me," said Mr. Soutar.

"Yes, Malcolm,—until you give me leave," said Mr. Graham.

"Whaur 's Mr. Morrison?" asked Malcolm.

"He is still in the house," said Mr. Soutar.

"Gang till him, sir, an' gar him promise, on the word o' a gentleman, to haud his tongue. I canna bide to hae 't blaret a' gait an' a' at ance. For Mistress Catanach, I s' deal wi' her mysel'."

The door opened, and, in all the conscious dignity conferred by the immunities and prerogatives of her calling, Mrs. Catanach walked into the room.

"A word wi' ye, Mistress Catanach," said Malcolm.

"Certainly, my lord," answered the howdy, with mingled presumption and respect, and followed him to the dining-room.

"Weel, my lord," she began, before he had turned from shutting the door behind them, in the tone and with the air, or rather *airs*, of having conferred a great benefit, and expecting its recognition.

"Mistress Catanach," interrupted Malcolm, turning and facing her, "gien I be un'er ony obligation to you, it 's frae anither tongue I maun hear 't.

But I hae an offer to mak ye: Sae lang as it disna come oot 'at I 'm onything better nor a fisherman born, ye s' hae yer twinty poun' i' the year, peyed ye quarterly. But the moment fowk says wha I am, ye touch na a poun' not' mair, an' I coont mysel' free to pursue onything I can pruv agane ye."

Mrs. Catanach attempted a laugh of scorn, but her face was grey as putty, and its muscles declined response.

"*Ay* or *no?*" said Malcolm. "I winna gar ye sweir, for I wad lippen to yer aith no a hair."

"Ay, my lord," said the howdy, reassuming at least outward composure, and with it her natural brass, for as she spoke she held out her open palm.

"Na, na!" said Malcolm, "nae forehan' payments! Three months o' tongue-haudin', an' there 's yer five poun'; an' Maister Soutar o' Duff Harbour 'ill pay 't intill yer ain han'. But brak troth wi' me, an' ye s' hear o' 't; for gien ye war hangt, the warl' wad be but the cleaner. Noo quit the hoose, an' never lat me see ye aboot the place again. But afore ye gang, I gie ye fair warnin' 'at I mean to win at a' yer byganes."

The blood of red wrath was seething in Mrs.

Catanach's face; she drew herself up, and stood flaming before him, on the verge of explosion.

"Gang frae the hoose," said Malcolm, "or I'll set the muckle hun' to shaw ye the gait."

Her face turned the colour of ashes, and with hanging cheeks and scared but not the less wicked eyes, she hurried from the room. Malcolm watched her out of the house, then following her into the town, brought Miss Horn back with him to aid in the last of earthly services, and hastened to Duncan's cottage.

But to his amazement and distress, it was forsaken, and the hearth cold. In his attendance on his father, he had not seen the piper—he could not remember for how many days; and on inquiry he found that, although he had not been missed, no one could recall having seen him later than three or four days agone. The last he could hear of him in the neighbourhood was, that, about a week before, a boy had spied him sitting on a rock in the Baillies' Barn, with his pipes in his lap. Searching the cottage, he found that his broadsword and dirk, with all his poor finery, were gone.

That same night Mrs. Catanach also disappeared.

A week after, what was left of Lord Lossie was

buried. Malcolm followed the hearse with the household. Miss Horn walked immediately behind him, on the arm of the schoolmaster. It was a great funeral, with a short road, for the body was laid in the church—close to the wall, just under the crusader with the Norman canopy.

Lady Florimel wept incessantly for three days; on the fourth she looked out on the sea and thought it very dreary; on the fifth she found a certain gratification in hearing herself called the marchioness; on the sixth she tried on her mourning, and was pleased; on the seventh she went with the funeral and wept again; on the eighth came Lady Bellair, who on the ninth carried her away.

To Malcolm she had not spoken once.

Mr. Graham left Portlossie.

Miss Horn took to her bed for a week.

Mr. Crathie removed his office to the House itself, took upon him the function of steward as well as factor, had the state-rooms dismantled, and was master of the place.

Malcolm helped Stoat with the horses, and did odd jobs for Mr. Crathie. From his likeness to the old marquis, as he was still called, the factor

had a favour for him, firmly believing the said marquis to be his father, and Mrs. Stewart his mother. Hence he allowed him a key to the library, of which Malcolm made good use.

The story of Malcolm's plans and what came of them, requires another book.

THE END.